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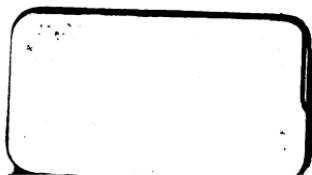
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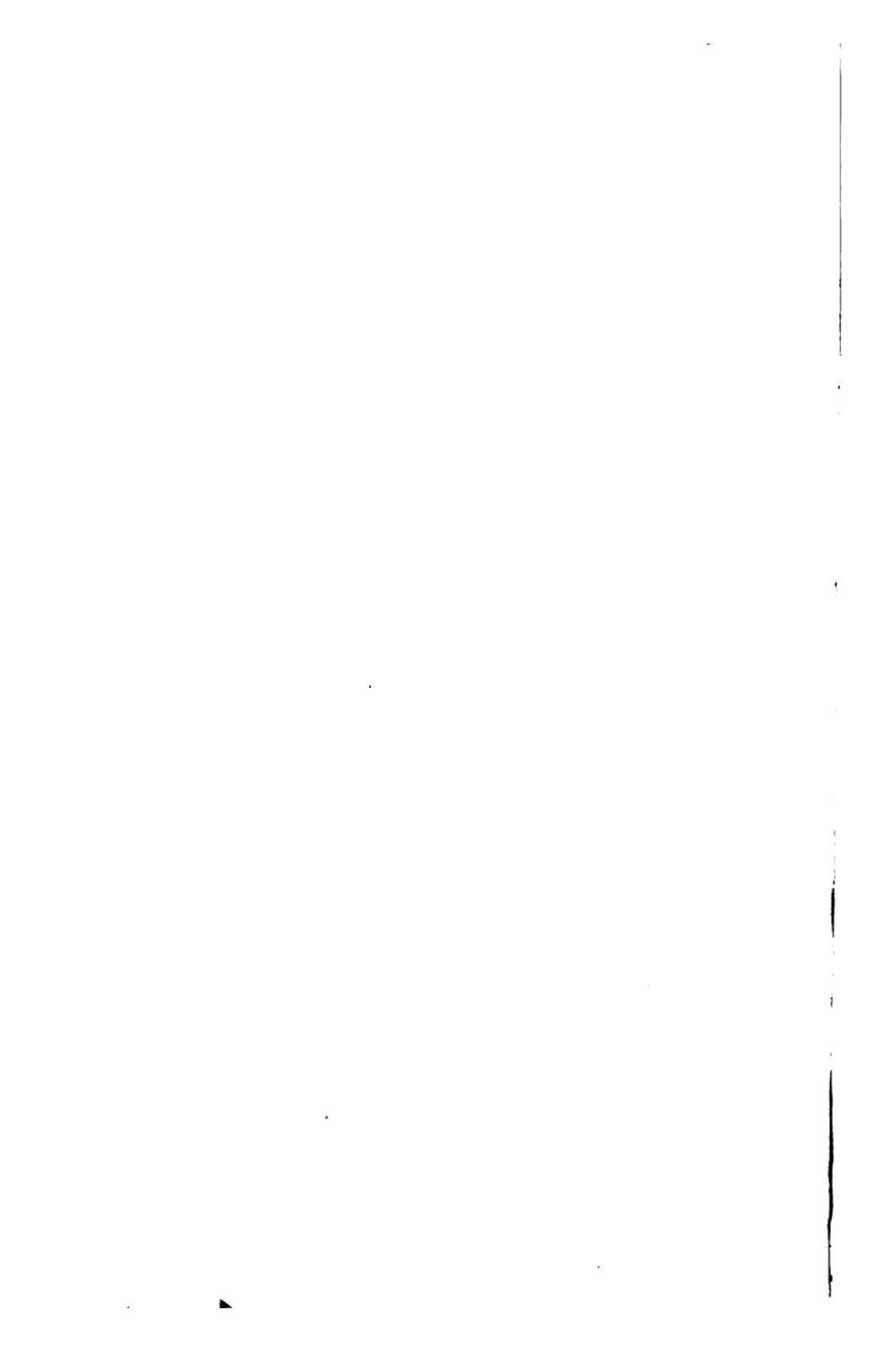
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THE
COTTAGER'S GUIDE
TO THE
NEW TESTAMENT:
THAT IS,
THE LIFE AND DOCTRINE
OF
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,
PLAINLY SET FORTH.

VOL. II.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER DALLAS, A.M.
RECTOR OF WONSTON, HANTS.

"Whom shall he teach knowledge; and whom shall he make to understand doctrine ? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept ; line upon line, line upon line ; here a little, and there a little." Isaiah xxviii. 9, 10.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." Luke iv. 18.

"To the poor the Gospel is preached." Luke vii. 22.

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THE
COTTAGER'S GUIDE,
&c.

FORTY-THIRD PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. viii. verse 1 ; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. v. verses 1 to 11.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

Luke v. verse

1. pressed *means here* crowded closely
lake sea, or great piece of water
- 2, &c. ships fishing boats
3. thrust out push the boats off
4. launch out guide the boats further
deep part where the water was deep
for a draught to catch some fish
5. toiled worked hard
6. inclosed took into the net
7. beckoned made signs

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

When our Lord had finished his Sermon, he came down from the rising ground on which he had sat while he had been teaching (see vol.i, page 241), and great crowds of people followed him.

The Town of Capernaum to which Jesus returned, after making his journey all about the country of Galilee (see vol. i, page 233), was close upon the Sea or lake of Gennesaret. (see vol. i, page 218). He was one day standing by the water side, and a great number of people came round him, hoping to hear him preach again the word of God, as he had done before. They crowded so closely about him, that they did not give him room to address them conveniently. It so happened that there were two fishing boats near at hand, close upon the shore. These belonged to Simon, and to James and John, the persons whom he had called away from their employment as fishermen to go along with him in the journey he had made round Galilee. (see vol. i, page 219.) After having returned from that journey they had gone back again to their work, and at this time, having passed the night in fishing, they had left their boats, and were cleaning their nets. Our Lord got into the boat which belonged to Simon ,and desired him to push it a little way on the water, so that he might be near the land without being crowded. Then sitting in the boat, he preached to the people who were standing on the shire.

Having finished his discourse, he desired Peter to make the boat go further out to sea, that they might come into deep water ; and then to cast out his drag nets, for the purpose of catching some fish. Simon told him respectfully, that they had been working hard all the night (which is the best time for taking fish), and had not caught any : but Simon remembered the wonderful things he had seen Jesus do during the journey through Galilee ; and therefore, however little likelihood there

seemed of taking any quantity of fish at that time, still he said, that as Jesus desired him, he would cast the net. Accordingly they did so ; and immediately the net was filled with a great number of fishes ; so many that it could hold no more, and was ready to break. Simon with his men made signs to their fellow-fishermen, who were in the other boat, that they wanted their help ; the other fishermen came, and they managed together to draw up the nets, and to get the fish into the boats. There were enough to fill both of them ; so much so, that they could hardly float upon the water, and were almost ready to sink. The sight of this wonderful quantity of fishes, brought into the nets by the will of Jesus Christ, had a very great effect upon the mind of Simon Peter. It convinced him that the person who could do this wonderful thing had indeed the Almighty power of God ; and when he felt that he was in the presence of the "Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (*Isaiah ix. 6.*), it brought to his mind a sense of his own sinfulness, and made him feel how unfit he was to stand before God. He cast himself down before the Lord Jesus and humbly embraced his knees. He expressed what he felt by saying "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." James and John (who were Simon's companions), as well as all the fishermen that were with them, felt the same astonishment at the miracle which had been wrought. Jesus desired Simon to recover from his alarm, and took the opportunity of explaining to him the way in which afterwards he meant to employ him. At another time He compared the preaching of the Gospel to a fishing net, in which fish of every kind were taken (*Matt. xiii. 47—50.*) ; and he made the

same comparison now, by telling Peter that from that time, instead of being occupied in catching fish, he should catch men ; not for the purpose of destroying them, but to give them life by the Gospel. Very likely He may have intended more particularly to refer to the wonderful effect that was produced by the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of this same Simon Peter, when, on the day of Pentecost, "about three thousand souls" were caught into the Gospel net. (Acts ii. 14, 41.)

The fishermen brought their boats to the shore, and having landed, they left all the fish that had been taken, and went with Jesus.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures. See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. Great crowds of people continually followed the Lord Jesus Christ, and shewed much desire to hear Him preach. Those who heard him could not do otherwise than acknowledge, that his preaching was with greater power than any they had heard before. (Matthew vii. 28, 29.) Yet it is very painful to think, how few there were who really profited by what he taught them ; and how many there were, whose desire to hear the preaching was not mixed with any desire to receive the doctrine. There were only one hundred and twenty persons who were his disciples in Judea up to the time of his death. (Acts i. 15.) And amongst the great numbers who cried out to have Jesus crucified, and to have the murderer Barabbas set at liberty, there must have been numbers of the same persons who had crowded around him, and heard him preach. This thought should bring to our minds the warn-

ing of our Lord himself, "take heed how ye hear." (Luke viii. 18. Mark iv. 24.) We are all apt to profess much readiness to hear the Word of God, and our churches are oftentimes crowded with people who come to hear about Christ: but it is to be feared that, amongst such crowds, there may be many who do not scruple afterwards to deny by their lives their profession of the Gospel (Tit. i. 16.); and by committing sin willingly, to "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. vi. 6.) The kind and self-denying manner in which our Lord was ever ready to teach the people, only made their sin the greater for paying so little attention to what he taught; and our many opportunities of hearing the Gospel, and of learning the way of salvation, must have very much the same effect, in increasing the sinfulness of careless hearers in the present day.

QUESTIONS.

Am I one of those who follow a crowd, in worshipping God and hearing sermons, without bringing forth the proper fruits of attention?

Am I sensible that the many means of grace, which are offered to me, will make me the more sinful if I do not really profit by them?

2. The four disciples, who had followed Jesus when he had called them, and left their employment to go with him round Galilee (see vol. i. page 219), returned to their business as soon as Jesus had no immediate occasion for their services. They followed their occupation with diligence; but were ready, at any moment, to obey whatever orders our Lord might think proper to give them. This is an example by which we ought to profit; taking care to be "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the

Lord." (Rom. xii. 11.) Religion is the first concern, and to follow that in a right spirit, is sure to make us diligent in our calling : yet, whatever that calling may happen to be, we must regulate ourselves at all times, and in all things, according to the Word of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION.

Do I ever make religion an excuse for neglecting my proper business in this life ? Or, do I ever make my ordinary duty in this life an excuse for neglecting my religious duties ?

3. The miracle described in this portion has its direct application to the ministers of the Gospel, as our Lord applied it to Simon Peter in his character of an Apostle. It is not necessary to point out such an application here. But the people also to whom the Gospel is sent by means of Christ's ministers, may perceive, from this miracle, that the success of every preaching of God's Word depends upon the will of Jesus to bring souls under the obedience of the Gospel ; while ministers can do no more than preach : just as it was our Lord who brought the fishes into the net, while Peter had done no more than cast it into the sea. (Psa. cx. 3. Zech. iv. 6.) All persons therefore, who desire to see their neighbours and friends brought effectually under the power of religion, should be led by this to seek the blessing of Christ to produce that effect, which is too often expected from particular talents in the preacher : and it should induce us to be earnest in prayer to Christ, that He may give success to the ministry of his word.

QUESTION.

Am I in the habit of expecting, that particular ministers ~~must~~ make people religious ? Or, do I look to Christ alone for a blessing upon the means of grace, and pray to Him accordingly to give the success which is to be desired ?

4. Such feelings as those which Peter had, when he was convinced that he stood in the presence of God, have been felt at different times by the true servants of God, when they have been favoured with any plain marks of His power and majesty. (Isa. vi. 1—5. John xii. 41. Judges vi. 22.) And without actually seeing the glory of God as Isaiah did, or witnessing such a miracle as Peter did, yet many times the Christian is blessed with so strong an impression of the truth of all that is told in the Gospel, and of the presence of God around him, that these great things seem real to the mind, and are effectual to the heart. One consequence of such blessed occasions is, that they make us more than ever feel our great sinfulness and our unworthiness to appear before God. We Christians, who live in the days when the Holy Spirit has come from heaven to teach and guide the Church of Christ (John xvi. 13, 14.), have a greater advantage than Peter had when his heart was overwhelmed with a sense of Christ's divine power. To those who are led by the Spirit of Christ (Rom. viii. 14. 2 Tim. i. 7.) he has already said "Fear not," because He has made a way for us to appear before God. (Rom. v. 2. Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12.) But though our alarm may be laid aside, yet the same bumbling effect takes place in the heart; and the greatest signs of God's favour are most likely to humble us under His mighty hand, that He may exalt us in due time. (James iv. 10. 1 Peter v. 6.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I truly convinced that my sinful state makes me unworthy to appear before God?

Does this make me the more humbled, the more I perceive and feel that, in spite of my sinfulness, God permits me to approach Him?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Ask for a serious and attentive spirit, in making use of all the opportunities of christian instruction which are afforded you, and for grace to profit by them.
2. Pray that you may do your duty in that state of life to which God has pleased to call you, with christian diligence; and that in all your worldly occupations, you may be guided by obedience to Christ in the first place.
3. Pray that you may have an entire dependance upon the Spirit of Christ, ingiving power to the preaching of the Gospel; and ask for an abundant blessing upon the ministry of His holy Word.
4. Humble yourself as a sinner before God; and pray to be favoured with such a sense of His presence as may keep you humble, while you approach Him through Christ.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O God, who desistest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, give me a spirit of seriousness and attention whenever I have an opportunity of being instructed in the way of life. Let me not hear thy word carelessly; but give me grace that it may sink deep into my heart, and bring forth much fruit, so that my profiting may appear unto all men. [2] Do thou so rule and govern my heart, that in all things I may follow thy way; and grant that whatsoever thou art pleased to appoint for my work here upon earth, I may do it diligently, as unto Thee, and not unto man. Let not my worldly occupation hinder me from fulfilling my religious duties; but let my religious duties excite me to more earnest diligence in my calling. [3] I thank Thee, O God, for the Gospel of thy blessed Son, and for the many means by which it is now declared to me, and to my fellow sinners. Teach me

ever to remember, that success in the preaching of that Gospel is not to be obtained by might nor by power, but by thy Spirit alone. Let the blessing of that Holy Spirit come abundantly upon this country, and upon the nations of the world, that thou mayest speedily complete the number of thine elect, and hasten thy kingdom. [4] I desire to humble myself, O God, under a sense of thy great power and glory. I acknowledge that I am wholly unworthy to appear before Thee; I am a miserable sinner, and my sins are more in number than the hairs of my head. Yet, for Christ's sake, have mercy upon me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me; but give me such a trust in thy Holy Word, and such a lively sense of thy presence, as may keep me humble under a sense of my own sinfulness, while I am still able to approach Thee, through the all powerful mediation of Thy Son, my Saviour, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Our Father, &c.

FORTY-FOURTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. viii. ver. 2 to 4 ; St. Mark's Gospel, chap. i. verses 40 to 45 ; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. v. verses 12 to 16.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

Matthew viii. verse

2, &c. a leper	<i>means here</i>	a person who has the leprosy
clean	well
4, &c. a testimony	a proof of being cured
Mark i. verse		
43. straitly charged	particularly desired
45. publish it	make it known
blaze abroad	talk a great deal about

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

It happened that while Jesus was at one of the towns in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, he was met by a man who had the leprosy.

As this is the first time that the leprosy has been

mentioned, it will be necessary to give some more particular explanation concerning it. It is a very dreadful disease, which corrupts all the blood, and consequently affects the skin and every part of the body, putting the person who has it into a most painful and offensive state. This state is particularly described in the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus. It goes on gradually getting worse and worse, and there is no means which has ever been found to cure it ; but if people recover, it is by God's good will, as they get well without medicine, (2 Kings v. 7.) and their flesh becomes white and fresh, being renewed like the flesh of a little child. (2 Kings v. 14. Lev. xiii. 16, 17.) This disease is infectious, that is, it may be taken by touching any one who has got it ; and therefore it was a law amongst the Jews, that all persons who were thus afflicted should have nothing to do with other people, but keep themselves entirely distinct and separate—they were obliged to wear clothes that were torn, which was a mark of grief, and they were commanded to cry out “unclean, unclean” when any one came near them. (Lev. xiii. 45, 46. Numb. v. 2, 3 ; xii. 10, 14, 15. 2 Kings. vii. 3.)

This dreadful disease was intended to be a sort of picture and representation in the bodies of men, of that more dreadful disease of sin which affects their souls : so that by making them see and feel the effects of leprosy in the body, they might learn to understand the effects of sin in the soul. Some cases are told in the Scripture, in which persons became lepers in consequence of particular sins which they committed ; as Miriam, Azariah, Uzziah, Gehazi (Numbers. xii. 9, 10. 2 Chron. xxvi. 19. 2 Kings v. 22, 25, 27.), but it is the general

sinful state of all men's hearts which the disease is intended to shew. Sin is not an evil which is hurtful in one part of the character only, but it corrupts the whole heart, and turns us from God altogether. (Gen. vi. 5. Isa. i. 5, 6. Rom. vii. 14, 18.) By degrees it deadens the conscience, and hardens the heart; so that it leads men at last to commit and to tolerate the most wicked and offensive things. (Eph. iv. 18, 19. 1 Tim. iv. 2. Isa. v. 20.) We ourselves have no means of delivering ourselves from the power of sin, nor from the habit of it—no strength in our own wisdom to stand against it, no remedy for the consequences which we produce by sin; but if any one is redeemed and taken out of this dreadful state, it is by the power and mercy of God alone. (Zech. iv. 6. Eph. ii. 8. Titus iii. 4, 5. Ps. xlix. 7, 8.) When any sinner is brought out of the power and condemnation of sin, his soul is said to be born again—a great and entire change takes place, by which he is renewed in spirit, and becomes "as a little child." (John iii. 5. 2 Cor. v. 17, 18. Rom. xii. 2. Matt. xviii. 3.) Sin is infectious; that is, persons who keep company with sinners, and meddle with their sins, will be led on to commit the same things themselves. (Pro. vi. 27, 28; xxii. 24, 25. 1 Cor. xv. 33. Psa. cxi. 35.) They who profess to love God and to hate sin, are forbidden to keep company with open sinners. (Prov. v. 14, 15. 2 Cor. vi. 14-18.) Such persons by their improper conduct, give warning of their miserable condition as plainly as if they wore particular clothes to distinguish them, or were constantly crying out, "I am unclean:" (Matt. vii. 16-20. 1 Tim. v. 24. Phil. iii. 19.) and the time will come, when those who continue in sin will be for ever shut out from the company of those who left

their sins and turned to God. (Matt. vii. 23. Eph.v. 5. Rev. xxii. 15)

Thus then the leprosy was meant to be an outward picture or representation of sin. And, in like manner, when God appointed amongst the Jews a particular way in which every leper who recovered should be restored to society, and be considered as *clean*, (see vol. i, p.62) He was pleased to order some things to be done, which may serve also as an outward picture or representation of the work of Christ, by which alone sinners can be restored to God's favour, and be considered just in his sight. The leper was not to be treated as cured, until he had been declared to be so by the Priest, who is said to make him clean. (Lev. xiv. 2,3,11.) Just so, no sinner can be looked upon as having returned to God, but according to Christ's holy word and by His power. The leper was to take two clean birds, he was to kill one of these birds in an earthen pot, over a stream of running (or living) water; (see vol. i, page 189) the other bird was to be dipped into the blood of that which had been thus killed, and then let fly away in the open air, while the leper was to be sprinkled with the same blood. (Lev. xiv. 4—7.) These things were intended to shew by outward tokens the crucifying of Jesus Christ; who, as a man, clean from sin, was killed for the sins of the world (1 Peter ii, 22, 24.) who had the fulness of the Holy Ghost (John iii. 34. Col. i. 19.)—who rose from the dead (Acts ii 23,24; xvii. 31,) —and ascended into heaven. (Acts i. 9. iii. 21 .Mark xvi. 19.) And they include also a token of that particular faith, by which this great act of general mercy is applied to any one sinner. (Mark xvi.16. Rom. v. 1. 1Tim. iv. 10.) Two birds were used, because one after being killed could not be brought to

life again, which would be necessary, to make the token altogether a correct one. They were to be clean birds, to shew that Christ was without spot of sin. The killing of one bird shewed the crucifixion of our Lord, and its being done in an earthen vessel shewed that he was in the flesh, a man born of a woman. The running or living water represented the Holy Spirit, which he, as a man, possessed without measure, and was thereby prepared for an atoning sacrifice. (Heb. ix. 14). The dipping of the live bird in the blood of the dead one, and then letting it fly away in the open air, shews how that the same Jesus who died and was buried, afterwards rose again and ascended into Heaven: and the leper was sprinkled with the blood, to signify the faith, which by particularly applying the great atonement of Christ, brings the advantage of it to the sinner's soul. In consequence of all this, the leper was declared to be clean of his leprosy; thus to teach us, that it is the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John i. 7.)

After this ceremony was ended, the person was commanded to wash himself very carefully in water, and to put away every thing that was in the least likely to hold any of the corruption of his past disease. (Lev. xiv. 8, 9.) This was to give a plain token, that the sinner who has faithfully applied the salvation of Christ, must put away from him altogether those sins which made Christ's death necessary; that he must not only give up his old sins, purifying his heart by the Holy Spirit, (shewn by careful washing in water, see Heb. x. 22) but he must avoid every temptation which is likely to keep the least remnant of indulged sin in him. (2 Tim. ii. 19. Rom. vi. 1, 2, 11—23. Matt. xxvi. 41; vi. 13.) Another part of

the restored leper's duty was to offer some appointed marks of gratitude and of a sense of continued unworthiness, which were to be brought to the temple of the Lord.(Lev.xiv.10—32.) And this was to shew the humble gratitude and continued self-reproach, with which the pardoned sinner always reflects upon the sufferings of Christ, which were made necessary by his sins ; and also his desire to enter into the service of that God, who has visited him with so much mercy. (Luke xvii. 10. Col. iii. 1, 2.)

The man who met Jesus Christ at the time we are speaking of, had this dreadful disease of leprosy in its worst state: as soon then as he saw our Lord he came to him, knelt down before Him, and putting his face to the ground in token of worship, he earnestly entreated Him to cure him. He called Him Lord, and said, he knew that if he were so pleased He was quite able to make him clean ; that is to say, to recover him from his disease, and restore him to the society of his neighbours. Jesus felt pity for the poor man—He stretched out his hand, and though he had that disease which a fellow-sinner would have caught by touching him, and by which he would have been defiled, yet Jesus did not refuse, but laid his hand upon him, and told him that He had the good-will to heal him, and therefore that he should be clean. At the very moment that these words were spoken the leprosy entirely left the man, and he became perfectly well.

Jesus then particularly desired him not to tell the people what had happened. This he seems to have done that there might not be more excitement than there already was ; and that the Chief Priests and Pharisees might not be stirred up to put him to death before the appointed time. He bid the man go without

delay and acquaint the Priest, whose duty it was to perform the office of cleansing lepers, according to that appointment (Lev. xiv.), which has been already explained. He desired him also to make the offerings which were ordered, under the direction of God, by Moses, in that chapter; that he might have the proper proof by which to convince his neighbours, that they were no longer to separate him from their company.

The man, however, as he went to do what he was told, could not refrain from making known this wonderful miracle. He spoke of it to every body as he went along; so that the report of what Jesus had done spread abroad, and vast numbers of people assembled wherever he went, to hear him preach, and to be cured of their diseases. The crowds became so great, that Jesus could not pass publicly through the streets; he retired therefore into the country places where there were few inhabitants, and occupied himself in prayer: but even then the people found out where he was, and flocked to him from all parts of the neighbourhood.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures: see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The dreadful picture of sin which the leprosy sets before us, ought to make us consider the offensiveness of our state as sinners in the sight of God. We all of us shudder at the thought of our bodies being afflicted with so distressing a plague, and we feel how shocking we should be in the sight of our fellow men, if we were lepers: but in truth the plague of sin ought to be still more distressing to us; and we are, as sinners, still more offensive to the

eye of God, than we should be as lepers to the eye of man. This view of sin is very different from the common notion; by which persons are no more distressed when they call themselves sinners, than when they call themselves men or women. As soon however as we really feel that sin is a spiritual leprosy, and that we ourselves as sinners must be hateful to the all-pure God, the way is at once open to us for that perfect cleansing, which was pictured by the two birds, one killed in the earthen vessel over running water, the other dipped in its blood and flying away to heaven. To believe that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin, is both a cure for our sinfulness, and also the power by which we may resist sin in future: but neither the cure nor the power can ever be effectually applied, until we have discovered the miserable state of soul to which sin really brings us.

QUESTIONS.

Am I really aware that, as a sinner, I am as offensive to God as a leper is to his fellow-men?

Does this thought alarm me, and give me a feeling of real distress when I reflect that I am a sinner?

Does it increase my rejoicing that Jesus Christ has died to save sinners?

2. The leper who came to our Lord plainly shewed a full trust in His divine power to heal him, while he earnestly prayed that Jesus would shew such love and kindness towards him, as to exercise that power. Our Lord's conduct plainly proved that he not only had the power, but the will to cure the poor man, who approached him in this manner: and sinners must come to Christ Jesus now, with the same faith in his power which this man shewed; and with such confidence in Christ's willingness

to save them from their sins, as is warranted by his conduct upon this occasion. In these Gospel days a sinner may not only say to Christ, "I know that thou canst make me clean, if Thou wilt!" but he may also say "Thou hast given thy life for me; and I know by this greatest proof of love, that thou art willing to make me clean from my sin, if I come to thee." It is this state of heart alone, which can give a sinner joy and peace in believing.

QUESTIONS.

Am I fully persuaded that Christ is able, by His Spirit, at this time, to save me, from the defilement of my transgressions and from the power which sin would have over me?

Am I equally persuaded, that as He died that He might be in a situation to exercise this power, so he is willing to extend his salvation even to me?

3. The object of the law given by Moses concerning lepers was to direct the mind to Christ as the Saviour. When therefore He himself had cured a leper, it would have seemed to us unnecessary for him to send the man to the Priest to do what Moses had commanded. Yet we find that Jesus desired him strictly to obey the law; just as He had told John at his own baptism, that it became him to fulfil all righteousness—that is to say, that it was proper that he, as man, should perform exactly all that it was right for every man to do. (Matt.iii. 15; see vol.i. p.119) If Jesus himself judged it right, that all the ordinances appointed by God amongst the Jews should be strictly complied with, it must surely become us to be very careful in our attendance upon those means of grace, which are intended to teach us concerning Christ in these Gospel times.

QUESTIONS.

Am I diligent and regular in my attendance on all the appointed Ordinances of religion?

Do I regularly attend Public Worship? and frequently partake of the Lord's Supper? or—

Am I careless in these matters, considering it not very important to be strict about them?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a deep sense of the sinfulness of sin; and of the evil of your own sins.

2. Confess your sinfulness; and express your sorrow for your sins.

3. Pray for a hearty reliance on the power and love of Christ in saving you from your sins.

4. Ask that by regular attendance upon the ordinances of religion, you may be strengthened in such a reliance on Christ.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—Maker of all things—Judge of all men, I beseech Thee to make me fully understand, and deeply feel, how hateful a thing sin is, and how offensive my sins are in thy sight. [2] I acknowledge and bewail my manifold sins and wickednesses, which I have from time to time most grievously committed, by thought, word, and deed against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against me. I do earnestly repent, and am heartily sorry for these my misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto me; the burthen of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon me, most merciful Father; for thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me all that is past; and grant that I may ever hereafter serve and please Thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory

of thy Name. [3] Teach me to know that as thou art able, O Lord Jesus Christ, to save me from my sins, so thou art also willing to do so. [4] Give me grace to take advantage of every appointed means of instruction : make me diligent in attending thine ordinances ; and grant that they may ever increase my faithful dependence upon thy power and love, O my merciful and Almighty Saviour. *Amen.*

Our Father, &c.

FORTY-FIFTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. ix. ver. 2 to 8 ; St. Mark's Gospel, chap. ii. verses 1 to 12 ; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. v. verses 17 to 26.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

Matthew ix. verse

8. glorified *means here* praised

Mark ii. verse

1. noised much talked about

3. borne of carried by

4. press crowd

12. fashion manner

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After having remained some time privately in the country, Jesus went again to the city of Capernaum. No sooner had he come to the house in which he took up his abode, than his arrival was talked of all over the town. The people immediately collected to see him. Many were admitted into the house, until there was no more room for them : they then crowded about the door, and filled the street. Some of the Pharisees and of the Scribes, having heard so much about him, had journeyed for the purpose of

seeing him, from the different towns where they lived in the countries of Galilee and Judea, and even from Jerusalem itself. These persons came to him as soon as his return to Capernaum was known, and were in the room upon this occasion. Our Lord took this opportunity of doing good to the people who had thus assembled, by preaching to them the message of God, and by using his divine power to heal the sick.

At the time that Jesus was thus occupied, there were four men, who were desirous of bringing to him a friend of theirs, a person afflicted with the palsy, and unable to leave his bed. The four friends had brought the sick man upon a light couch or mattress, to the house in which Jesus lived. They found the entrance to be so entirely crowded with people, that it was impossible even to pass ; much less could they make their way, with such a burden as that which they carried. If they had been less anxious about their friend, or if they had not been quite sure that Jesus was both able and willing to cure him, they would certainly have given up their attempt, when they were thus hindered : but they had a strong faith, which made them determine to overcome every difficulty, and they soon found out a way of bringing this sick friend to Jesus.

The houses in that country were (and are to this day) built in a different way from ours. They have all got flat roofs, which are paved with earth or brick, having low walls on each side, to prevent the danger of falling over. (Deut. xxii. 8.) There is seldom any division between the houses on these roofs ; so that a person may go from one end of the street to the other, upon the tops of the houses, without any trouble ; and the house-top was the

common place where neighbours met each other, and took their walk in company. (Luke xii. 3. 2 Sam. xi. 2.) Most of the houses, particularly those of the poorer sort, are generally one story high; and there was commonly a ladder, or flight of steps, on the *outside* of the house, by which people could get up and down without going by the stairs on the inside. (Matt. xxiv. 17.)

The four men, finding they could not get to Jesus, by the door of the house, took their sick friend upon the house-top, by the nearest steps they could reach in the same street; and by this means, they came to the roof of the house where our Lord was teaching. As the house was but one story high, they took up the pavement, and removed enough of the rafters to make sufficient room to pass the mattress on which the palsied man lay; and then they let him down with cords into the room, in the middle of all the people, before our Lord.

The trouble which these persons had taken to overcome all the difficulties, plainly shewed that they firmly believed both the power and the kindness of Jesus; and therefore, "seeing their faith," he spoke to the sick man, in an encouraging manner, and told him that his sins were forgiven. The Scribes who were sitting by immediately thought within themselves, that Jesus was guilty of a great blasphemy, by wickedly pretending to have the power of forgiving sins, which belongs to none but God. Though this thought passed in their minds, they said nothing. But Jesus knows the thoughts of men (see vol. i. p. 164.) He at once understood in his Spirit the objections which were passing in their minds, and asked them why they were thus finding fault with him in their hearts. He pointed

out to them, that it could be nothing less than the power of God, which enabled him to cure this man's bodily disease by a word; and that the same divine power which could do this, could as easily forgive sins.

After reasoning thus with the Scribes, he said that he would give them proof that He, the Son of God, (who having been born of a woman was also "the Son of Man,") possessed as Man on earth the very power to forgive sins, which He had as God in heaven. (John v. 26, 27. Dan. vii. 13, 14.) He then turned to the palsied man, lying on the matress before him, and told him to get up, and to take the bed upon which he had lain; and as a proof of his strength, to carry it himself to his own house. No sooner had Christ spoken than the man was instantly cured of his palsy. He rose up, and taking up what he had been lying upon, walked through the crowd, who made way for him, to his own house; speaking the praises of God as he went along. The people who saw this wonderful cure done were struck with amazement. They too joined in praising God, whose power they found had been thus given to the man Christ Jesus. They were alarmed at the sight of such an extraordinary miracle, (see Luke v. 8) and declared that they never saw any thing like it before.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures: see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

In this portion of Scripture, our attention is particularly drawn to the faith of the four persons who

carried their sick friend to Christ. Their faith was plainly shewn by their conduct. It must have been a full conviction, that there were no other means of getting him cured so effectually ; and an entire confidence that Jesus both could and would do what they asked. If they had not felt all this, they would have been discouraged by the difficulties in their way, and they would hardly have ventured upon the bold step which they took. But, under such a belief, every hindrance was overcome ; and they found that Jesus did for them more than they asked, or could have thought of asking. (Eph. iii. 20, 21.) Although Jesus is no longer to be seen on the earth, as he was at that time, yet he is always near us, by his Spirit ; and is ready to satisfy those who come to him in spirit; by granting them blessings as large and unlooked for as he did upon this occasion. But the faith with which we now endeavour to come to him spiritually, must be of the same kind as that of the four men here spoken of. It must be plainly seen by our conduct—it must be a full conviction that we cannot obtain what we want, except from Christ—it must be an entire confidence in his power and his love—and it must be strong enough to overcome every difficulty rather than give up the great object of receiving His blessing.

QUESTIONS.

Is my faith like the faith of these men ? Have I reason to think that I am earnestly set upon coming to Christ ?

What difficulties have I overcome for the love of Christ ? Or, have the hindrances in my christian course made me give up my first religious desires and impressions ?

2. We should remark (for it is distinctly stated in this Scripture) that Jesus forgave the sins of the palsied man, upon seeing the faith of his friends.

We need not suppose that the affection and the faith in the hearts of these friends induced our Lord to do what he would not otherwise have done: but we are warranted to believe, from this passage of Scripture, together with others (1 John v. 16. Eph. vi. 18, 19. James v. 16. Acts xii. 5, 11, 12. Dan. ix. 20—23. Job. i. 5; xlvi. 8—10.), that God does make use of the particular affections of his faithful people, as the means of bringing to Christ those whose sins He forgives: and it is one of the most merciful parts of the blessed Gospel of Christ, that he is thus pleased to make use of our hearts in a manner so suited to our natural affections. One of the reasons why so many people continue under the influence of the dreadful disease of sin, is because their Christian friends have so little of that bold and persevering faith, of which we have here given us an example. Such a faith would lead us to be more frequent and earnest in bringing before Christ in prayer those friends who have no power to pray to Him themselves: and it would make us more patient and persevering in speaking to them of that Saviour whom they are prevented from seeing, by the crowd of worldly and sinful thoughts, which keep out of their minds any serious thoughts about their salvation.

QUESTIONS.

Are there any persons for whom I am in the habit of praying? Do I especially pray for those of my friends, who I think are hindered from coming to Christ themselves?

Am I particular and earnest in these prayers? or, do I only pray for my friends in a general and cold manner?

Am I encouraged by the promises which are made in Scripture to those who pray for others?

3. In healing this man, our Lord was pleased to declare that such miracles ought to have the effect

of making us clearly understand that he possessed the divine power of forgiving sins. We have many such miracles written for our learning: and these must make us inexcusable, if we doubt Christ's power and willingness to forgive our own sins; or if we neglect to take advantage of his mercy offered in the Gospel. Instances of greater power, than that of curing the palsy by a word, may very frequently be seen in our own days. Many open and profane sinners, who have lived in shameless wickedness, have been led by the Spirit of Christ, under the teaching of the Gospel, entirely to forsake their evil ways; and to live in a manner, which glorifies God as plainly as the palsied man praised him with his lips. When we see such a divine power exercised through the Spirit of Christ's religion, it should bring this miracle to our minds, and lead us to glorify him for the forgiveness of our sins.

QUESTIONS.

Do I sincerely believe that Christ Jesus has the power entirely and freely to forgive sin?

Am I encouraged by this belief fully to trust in him for the forgiveness of my own sins?

Am I living so as to glorify God, as a sinner should do who has been freely forgiven?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that your faith may be strengthened, so that no difficulties may hinder you from having a continual intercourse in prayer with Christ.

2. Pray to have a lively interest in the spiritual welfare of your friends, and a more earnest spirit of prayer on their behalf.

3. Pray for a firm belief in the divine power of Christ, to forgive sins; and for a comfortable and Scriptural conviction that your own sins are forgiven.

4. Ask for grace to live in such a manner as will shew to ourselves and others that you do praise God for the forgiveness of your sins.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Almighty Saviour, the author and finisher of our faith, teach me to believe thy gracious Word : increase and strengthen this faith in me, so that I may never think any thing too hard to do, in order that I may come to Thee : let no difficulties turn me from the way which leadeth to Thee, but enable me to overcome every hindrance, and continue in constant communion with Thee. [2] Increase my love for those amongst whom I dwell ; and direct that love to seek their spiritual welfare. Teach me how great a privilege it is to be permitted to pray for those whom I love ; and give me a more earnest spirit of prayer for them. [3] I know, O my Lord and Saviour, that thou canst forgive sin : Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief; comfort me with a sure hope and trust that thou hast forgiven my sins, though more in number than the hairs of my head. [4] I know how needful it is, that they whose sins are thus pardoned, should shew their thankfulness for this Thy mercy, not only with their lips, but in their lives : help me Lord, by thy Holy Spirit, that in my life and conversation I may glorify Thee, as one whose sins are forgiven. *Amen.*

Our Father, &c.

FORTY-SIXTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter ix. verse 9; St. Mark's Gospel, chapter ii. verses 13 to 22; and St. Luke's Gospel, chapter v. verses 27 to 39.

III. THE MEANINGS:

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

Matthew ix. verse

9, &c. at the receipt }
of custom } means here }
at the place where
money was paid
for taxes

Mark ii. verse

13. resorted came constantly

16. at meat at a meal

17, &c. physician doctor

19, &c. children of the }
bride-chamber } bridesmen

22. bottles } things made of leather or skins,

in which wine used to be put

marred spoiled

Luke v. verse

37. perish destroyed

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord was in the habit of walking by the sea side, and after the circumstances explained in the last portion, he went there as usual. All the people knowing that this was his custom, assembled there to meet him, and he preached to them.

As he was walking along, he came to the office, where the Publican used to remain to receive the taxes imposed by the Roman governors. (see vol. i, p. 111.) The person who was thus engaged at the time, was a Jew, by name Levi, son of a man named Alpheus. He was also called Matthew; it being very common for the Jews (especially those who had much to do with the foreign rulers) to have beside their Jewish names, a second name, more according to the Greek language, which was very commonly spoken in all those parts.

When Jesus saw him, he desired him to follow Him. Matthew must have already heard our Lord teach, and known of the miracles he had performed: he immediately rose from his seat, left his occupation, and went after Jesus.

In the evening Matthew received Jesus and His disciples at his own house; where he had provided a great supper, and had invited many of his friends and acquaintance, most of whom were engaged in the business which he had left. When the Scribes and the Pharisees saw Jesus at a supper, at the house of a publican, and there joined in company with many other publicans, and persons whose characters were commonly held in low repute, they found fault with him; and asked his disciples, why their Master sat down to table with such sort of people. Jesus heard the remark, and answered them by a comparison. He said, that healthy people had no occasion to go to a doctor, but those who were ill. And so, He came to call those persons to repentance who were spiritually diseased, that is, sinners, and not those who either were or thought themselves righteous.

The persons who had followed the teaching of

John the Baptist, were in the habit of fasting very frequently, as well as praying. This was the case also with those who were instructed by the Pharisees. (see vol i. p. 315. Luke xviii. 11, 12.) The persons who followed Jesus regularly had not as yet done any thing of this kind; and some of John's disciples with those of the Pharisees took the occasion, when they saw our Lord at this supper of Matthew's, to ask Him the reason of this difference. Jesus answered them by making use of John the Baptist's comparison, when he was questioned concerning Christ. (see vol. i. p. 179 John iii. 29.) He aluded to himself as the bridegroom, and to his disciples as the bridesmen, or persons attending upon a man at his marriage (which is the meaning of the expression "children of the bride-chamber.") He said that it was not usual for bridesmen to shew signs of grief, by fasting, while they were enjoying the company of the bridegroom: but He added, that the time would come when they should not have that cause for rejoicing, for that He was to be taken away from them; and that then his disciples would express their grief, and mortify themselves by religious fasting. (Matt. vi. 16—18. Acts xiii. 2, 3 ; xiv. 23. 1 Cor. vii. 5. 2Cor. vi. 5. xi. 27.)

Our Lord was pleased to give some further reasons for not at once commanding his disciples to fast, but for putting off to a future season the appointment of that useful means of expressing sorrow for sin, so customary at that time. This he did also by a comparison, which he called a parable. He said that no person would be so unwise as to use a piece of raw undressed cloth, for the purpose of patching an old garment, because the new piece would not suit with the old; and the old would not

bear the joining of the new, which would only tear it the more. By this he meant to shew, that with respect to such things as are not religion itself, but only the means of helping us in religion, (like the exercise of fasting) it would be unwise to expect what belonged to the spiritual life of the new Covenant (which was not yet fully declared), from persons who were only acquainted with the old Covenant. Such fasting as would really express a Christian's repentance, would not suit with the notions that a Jew had of keeping the Law: but on the contrary, it might seem to a Jew's mind, that his fasting would be a work of merit in himself; and so would increase his pride, and make his transgression of the law of God the greater,—his rent the worse.

To make this subject still clearer, Christ added another comparison. The people in those countries were in the habit of keeping their wine in the skins of animals, properly prepared so as to form large leathern bottles. (Glass was not in use at that time.) These were of course subject to decay, and after sometime became no longer serviceable. (Josh. ix. 4.) Our Lord said that no man would be so foolish, as to put new wine, which had yet to ferment, into leathern bottles, which had been long used, and were no longer strong. If such a thing were done, when the wine began to ferment, it would certainly burst the skins; by which means both the wine would run out and be lost, and the skins made of no further use at all. Instead of this, the new wine ought to be put into fresh skins, strong enough to stand the fermentation, and then both the wine and the bottles would be saved. The mention of the wine in this comparison, led him to give a second:

he said, that when people had been used to old wine, it was not likely that they should at once be able to relish new wine; but they would prefer the old, as being better. These comparisons were much to the same purpose as the former. The religious services and exercises of the New Covenant are too spiritual in their requirements for those who had been brought up entirely in the outward ordinances of the Old Covenant. To fit the disciples of Christ for the spiritual exercises of his religion, such an entire change was required, as that which afterwards took place by the preaching of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost. Besides this his disciples, at the time he was speaking, had been too long accustomed to the ordinances of the Law, and were too much prejudiced in their favour, to have any inclination to enter readily upon a full course of really Christian self-denial.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures : see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The application pointed out from that portion of Scripture which gave the account of our Lord's calling his four disciples, Simon and Andrew, and James and John, will be equally suitable, upon reading the account of the call of Matthew. The reader is therefore referred to the second application of the twenty-sixth portion (see vol. i. p. 220 ; Matthew iv. 18—22 ; Mark i. 16—20.)

2. Jesus accepted the invitation of Levi, and was present at a great supper or feast which he gave. This is one of the instances in our Lord's conduct, often brought forward as a reason why Christians may attend feasts, and other worldly enjoyments. This subject has been already explained, in applying

that part of Scripture, where we are told that our Lord attended the marriage of Cana (see portion 19. vol. i, p. 157; and particularly remark the Scriptures referred to in that application.) Besides what was then said, it should be observed that, upon the present occasion, the feast given by Matthew, was prepared in consequence of our Lord's having called him from his worldliness of life, to be His disciple. Also that Jesus himself states, that in attending it, he went as a Physician, for the express purpose of healing those who were spiritually diseased. It should also be remembered, that the persons amongst whom he mixed at this feast, were not those whose characters were outwardly decent, though negligent of religious duties; but they were persons who were openly charged with dishonesty, and plainly sinful conduct. Christians are not only permitted to seek such persons for the purpose of bringing them to a better state, but they are required especially to do all in their power, to make open sinners acquainted with the means of salvation by Christ Jesus. We are often apt to consider some persons as too much hardened; and too far gone in sin, to make it worth while, or even proper, to try to reform them. But our Lord's example, as well as his answers to the Scribes and Pharisees, ought to make us attempt to gain over the greatest sinners, without despairing of success.

QUESTIONS.

Do I know of any persons whom I consider as not worth attempting to change? Why do I think this concerning them? Is it likely that Christ would have thought so?

Do I make any attempts at softening the heart of any open profane sinner, who happens to be amongst my acquaintance, or in my neighbourhood?

3. While the last application teaches us the duty of taking every opportunity for bringing sinners to

true religion, our Lord's comparisons, in the latter part of this portion, shew us the necessity of using discretion and tenderness in requiring outward agreement in such things as, though very useful and proper in the exercise of religion, are not absolutely necessary. Many persons expect more than is reasonable in this way, from those who are beginning to feel the power of religion. It is impossible to expect or require too much, even from a beginner, as to the giving up of sinful practices, or important religious errors. But it is very possible too soon to expect too much as regards the manner of shewing religious impressions. Those who have profited by particular services, or found much enjoyment in the use of some particular means, are very likely to forget how long it took them to acquire that spiritual taste, or to receive that spiritual benefit, and how much longer it might take others who are of a different disposition. Such persons should apply our Lord's parable upon this occasion, and consider that it will not do to join new cloth upon an old garment, nor to put fermenting wine into worn-out skins; and this consideration should make them beware of judging hastily concerning those who do not agree with them in all their arrangements, though they may be making real endeavours to overcome sin.

QUESTIONS.

Are there any persons whom I do not consider to be really religious, merely because they do not join the religious exercises that I find useful to myself?

In speaking to any persons who I hope are advancing in religion, do I lay too much stress upon attendance on merely outward means; or, do I shew them principally how Christ requires and enables them to overcome sin in the heart?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that you may be ready to give up every thing that interferes with your being a true disciple of Christ.

2. Pray that your desire to be useful in saving sinners may make you anxious to do something to reform even the most wicked and profligate characters; and ask for grace to be enabled, in a christian spirit, to seek them for that purpose.

3. Pray to be blessed with a sound judgment, in distinguishing between what Christ requires at once from every person who professes to believe in Him, and what may be profitably done by christians in different states of feeling; and ask for a spirit of charity concerning beginners in religion.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Almighty God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; grant me grace to forsake all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ. [2] Stir up my will and affections that I may earnestly desire to be made useful in bringing my fellow sinners to the knowledge of Jesus Christ: and grant that I may so grieve for the dreadful state of those who commit sin openly with greediness, that I may not rest without shewing my grief, by doing something for their spiritual benefit. Give me grace that I may be like unto Thee, Lord Jesus, and, in thy Spirit, may strive to seek and to save them that are lost. [3] Bless me, I implore thee, O Father, with a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind; that rightly perceiving what is indeed the one thing needful, I may strive to communicate that to others; and tenderly considering their natural infirmities, may not judge any because of things that are not necessary. Teach me in the Spirit of love, to hope all things, through the power of Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FORTY-SEVENTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. John's Gospel, chapter v. verses 1 to 16.

III. THE MEANINGS:

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

John v. verse

1. feast	(see vol. i. page 85.)
	market, or "gate" (<i>see the margin.</i>)
2, &c. pool	<i>means here</i> bathing place
tongue	language
porches	covered buildings
3, &c. impotent	bed-ridden
halt	lame
withered	shrunk up
4, &c. troubled	stirred
whole.	well
6. case	condition
13. wist not	did not know
16. persecute Jesus . .	charged Jesus with breaking the law
slay him	kill him, or have him executed

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

A twelvemonth had passed since our Lord had begun his public ministry at Jerusalem, at the feast

of the Passover. (see twentieth portion, vol. i. p. 160.) The time of year had now come round for the keeping of the same great festival ; and Jesus took his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, in obedience to the law, which has been already explained. (see vol. i. p. 85.)

The city of Jerusalem had high walls all round it, with several gates, by which the inhabitants passed in and out. One of these was called the sheep-gate (Neh. iii. 1, 32 ; xii. 39.), and close by this gate there was a spring of water, which filled a place deep enough for people to bathe in. There were five low buildings built round this water, and the whole place was called, in the language of that country, Bethesda; the meaning of which word is, the House of Mercy. The buildings were full of persons afflicted with all sorts of diseases and bodily infirmities—some blind—some lame—some paralytic ; who were all laid down by the side of the bath, watching for the time when the water should begin to be ruffled.

This ruffling of the water used to happen every now and then, when an angel came from heaven and put it in motion : in consequence of which a wonderful effect was produced ; for, the first person who got into the water after it began to be stirred was sure to be entirely cured, whatever might have been the disease with which he had been afflicted.

Amongst the crowd of sick people in this place, there was one man who had been labouring under an infirmity in his body for thirty-eight years. Our Lord came to the house of mercy, and saw this man lying in one of the buildings. Jesus knew how long he had been in this miserable condition, and asked him whether he wished to be cured. The

man, who was bed-ridden, respectfully told him, that, being unable to move himself, he was also too poor to employ any one else to carry him down to the water, in time to be the first after it was moved ; and so it had always happened, that while he was trying, as well as he could, to get into the bath, somebody else had bathed before him : thus he had never received any benefit from the angel's visits. Upon this, our Lord was pleased to work a miracle in favour of the poor man : He told him to get up, to take up the mattress on which he lay, and to walk away. For any mere man to have said this, without having authority from God, would have seemed only to mock him ; but Jesus spoke with his power as the Son of God, and as soon as He had said the words, the man became perfectly well ; and according to Christ's directions took up the mattress on which he had been lying, and walked away. The day on which this happened was the Sabbath.

As the man, who had been thus cured, was going from the house of mercy, he met some of the Jews ; who, seeing that he carried his mattress, stopped him, and told him, that it was contrary to law for him to carry a load on that day. (Jer. xvii. 21, 22. Neh. xiii. 15—22.) The man told them that he had been wonderfully cured, and that the person who had done the miracle told him to take up his bed and walk away with it. These Jews took no notice whatever of the account the man gave of the miracle ; but being very strict as to the *outward* observance of the Sabbath, they asked him who was the person that had bid him do such a thing as to carry a load on the Sabbath-day. The man who had been cured did not know who it was that had made him well : for as soon as Jesus had done the

miracle, he had made himself unseen, and passed away, so as to avoid the great crowd of people that was collected around Him.

Some time after this, the man was in the temple (it may be hoped, for the purpose of returning thanks to God for his cure), and our Lord met him there. Jesus spoke to him, and warned him, that as he was now cured of his bodily infirmity, which had been brought on by his sins, he must be very careful not to give way to sin any more ; for if, after receiving so much mercy, he were to go on in sin again, God might see fit to bring upon him something still worse than his former disease. When the man went out of the temple he met some of the Jews who had found fault with him for carrying a burthen on the Sabbath-day ; and he informed them that Jesus was the person who had done the miracle upon him. These perverse Jews, however, would not take notice of what the man said concerning the cure, but they charged Jesus with breaking the laws ; and they tried to have him brought before the magistrate, that he might be condemned to death, because, according to their misrepresentation, he had followed a worldly occupation, by curing this man on the Sabbath Day. (Exod. xxxi. 12—17 ; xxxv. 1—3. Numb. xv. 32—36.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture : see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. We may very likely be surprised at what is told us in this portion about the cures at the house of Mercy ; because the means which God was pleased

to take was out of the common way, and the fact of the Angel's coming down at particular times, is especially mentioned. We know however from Scripture, that God entrusts to Angels the discharging of his Providential care for his people. (Heb. i. 14. Mat. xviii. 10. Psa. xci. 11,12.) And if we apply to particular cases, that truth concerning the services of angels which is thus generally stated, we shall then see reason to believe that what happened at the bathing place near the sheep-gate in Jerusalem, frequently happens in our days also. If we are in the habit of seeing God's hand in all his mercies towards us, we shall have no difficulty in acknowledging how he has given his angels charge over us, and through their means either healed us in many sicknesses, or hindered us from doing many things which would hurt our health. When we look at things in this light, every hospital will appear more wonderful than this Bethesda was: for there God's providence blesses the different means, which are used for different sicknesses, at all times. The people who went to the house of mercy, and endeavoured to get into the water at the right time, by so doing, took the proper means for their recovery; while they all knew that it was an angel that made them get well. Those who go to an hospital, or join a medical club, or send for a Doctor when they are sick, take the proper means which are open to them; but it is to be feared that comparatively few persons, while they do this, give any thought to the providential blessing of God, which only can make the medicine powerful to cure them: and though multitudes receive this blessing, but few shew their gratitude by acknowledging God's hand in their recovery.

QUESTIONS.

If I have ever recovered from any sickness, have I felt and acknowledged, that it was in consequence of God's blessing upon the means which were taken to make me well?

If I have enjoyed good health, do I feel and acknowledge that it is through God's providential care of me day by day?

2. From what our Lord said in, the Temple, to the man whom he had cured we may suppose that his sickness had been brought on by some sinful course of life. All sickness is in consequence of the original sin of our first parents: and therefore, though we may not have done anything to bring any particular illness on ourselves, yet every loss of health ought to bring to our remembrance the beginning of such afflictions, and ought to make us feel humbled as sinful children of Adam. But besides this, a great number of those who have lost their health, might trace the cause of their infirmities to their own sinful courses. Sometimes this is plain and evident, as in the case of drunkards, and other shameless sinners; but many times it is quite as truly, though not so plainly, the case with persons who will not charge themselves with any fault in bringing on their own ill-health. In all such cases, the Saviour may be said to question them, as he questioned this man, "Do you desire to be cured?" not indeed of the bodily infirmity, (which it is plain that every one would be glad to avoid) but the question is, whether, after feeling some of the consequences of sin in this world, there is a hearty desire to get rid of that dreadful disease which destroys the soul. While suffering pain, most people will express such a desire, when they are asked: but if they get well, how seldom does their con-

duct in health give any reason to hope, that they have indeed received the spiritual cure of sin from Christ ; who tells those whom he cures, to "sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to them."

QUESTIONS.

Does infirmity in my body bring me to consider more seriously the state of my soul ?

Am I heartily desirous to be in a fit state to serve God ; and willing rather to suffer any thing in my body, than to use my health in the service of sin ?

3. The subject of Sabbath healing, and of our Lord's conduct upon this occasion, will be considered in the forty-ninth portion ; where a more fitting opportunity for the application will occur. But the way in which this miracle was treated by the Jews who met the man carrying his bed, cannot be passed over without remark. The man told them that he had been cured in such a way, as proved that the person who cured him must have had the power of God ; and then he said, that he was obeying that person in carrying his mattress. The Jews, however, took no notice of the great matter of the miracle, but found much fault with the smaller matter, which offended against their notions of what was right. It is just so with the people of the world. If any body publicly professes to have received a spiritual life by the Gospel of Christ ; and proves that he has done so, by a more strict course of living ; the great change in conduct will be little heeded, but much offence will be taken at any exercise of christian liberty, which makes a man act contrary to the world's notions, in obedience to the commands of Christ.

QUESTIONS.

Do I ever join with those who find fault with religious people, because of small matters in which they act contrary to the customs of the world?

When I have heard of any remarkable change in people's conduct, which is ascribed to religious motives, have I cared little for the matter, and treated it as of no importance?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for grace to acknowledge God's providence in recovering you from sickness, or preserving you in health.
2. Pray that you may be brought by every affliction of bodily infirmity to be more attentive to the concerns of your soul, and may be made more watchful against sin.
3. Ask for a charitable spirit in judging of any small things that may seem irregular in the conduct of those, who are otherwise strict in religious matters.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

The two prayers in the twenty eighth portion (Vol. i. p.237) may be suitable also after reading this portion.

[1] O Almighty disposer of all events, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, and who hast declared that even the hairs of my head are all numbered; give me grace, I implore Thee, to see and acknowledge thy providential care of me, whether in sickness, or in health. I praise Thee that thou hast (restored me to health; or,) preserved me in health.
[2] Grant that whenever thou art pleased to permit me to suffer any bodily infirmity or pain, I may thereby be aroused to a more diligent concern for my soul, and become more watchful against all temptations to sin. [3] I beseech

Thee to send the Holy Ghost, and pour into my heart that most excellent gift of charity, that I may be kept from judging and hastily condemning such things as may seem unfitting in those who profess to be religious; and give me grace to hope all things from the power of thy Spirit, in those who are striving to obey thy commands, through Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

Our Father, &c.

FORTY-EIGHTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. John's Gospel, chap. v. verses 17 to 47.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

John v. verse

- 21. quickeneth *means here* gives life to
- 22. judgeth sits as a judge on
committed entrusteth, giveth
- 31. bear witness of myself . . state my own case
- 34. testimouy a proof of being true

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

The wicked conduct of the Jews (who attempted to bring a charge of sabbath-breaking against our Lord, in consequence of the miracle he had done on the Sabbath-day at the house of mercy) induced him plainly to declare the great mystery of his divinity ; that is, his being the Son of God, equal with the Father. While the Jews were trying how they could prove him to be guilty, so that he might

be condemned to death, he spoke to them in such a way as to claim the same power and authority with God the Father. He said, that up to that time, His father was always working ; (God, who made all things, keeps all things in their order, as well on one day as on another) and that accordingly He himself did the same. For saying this, the Jews were more earnest in trying to make out that he deserved the punishment of death, not only for breaking the Sabbath, but also for blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 16.) ; because, by calling God His Father in so peculiar a manner (very different from the way in which He is the Father of all men), they understood that Jesus claimed to be equal with God Himself.

Our Lord did not say that the Jews were mistaken in supposing that he meant to claim this ; but, on the contrary, after calling their attention, by solemnly repeating the word Amen, or Verily (see vol. i. page 170), he made answer by stating several ways in which He was so connected with God the Father, as no one could be, unless he were equal with Him. He declared that, as the Son of God, He cannot act contrary to the Father ; and that whatever the Father does, He can do, in the same manner as the Father. He declared the love of the Father for the Son, to be so great, that He lays open to him every thing that He himself does. He told the Jews that there were things still more extraordinary than the miracle they had just seen, which God the Father would lay open to the Son, to be performed before their eyes, that they would have more cause than ever to wonder : for, as God the Father at His own will and pleasure raises the dead, and gives them new life ; so He, as the Son, gives

life at his own will and pleasure to whatever persons he pleases. Jesus put before them yet another way, by which his equality with the Father might be proved: the Father is not the person before whom any one is brought to trial, but He has placed that high office, of sitting in judgment on the whole world, in the hands of the Son. And the object for which this was done was, that every soul should pay as much respect and worship to the Son, as they do to the Father. Whoever therefore did not treat Jesus, being the Son of God, with equal respect and worship, failed in paying due respect and worship to the Father who had sent Him into the world.

Having in so many ways declared the fact, that He is equal to the Father, our Lord solemnly confirmed what He thus stated, by laying claim to such power as can belong to God alone. He said, that whoever hears his word, and believes on the Father as having sent Him into the world, such a person *has* eternal life; and that, when the day of judgment comes, he is not condemned, but that, by receiving faithfully the word of truth, he passes out of a state of spiritual death into a state of spiritual life. Keeping up the solemnity of what he was saying, by repeating the Amen, Amen, he prophesied that a time was very close at hand, when people who were dead in their sins should hear His Gospel, and receive it as the voice of the Son of God; and should receive spiritual life, by attending to it as such. This he said he was able to do, because in the same way as God the Father is the fountain, or spring of Life, having life in himself, without receiving it from any other; so has he appointed that the Son should be the

fountain and spring of life, having life in *himself* without receiving it from any other. And the reason, why the office and power of sitting in judgment upon all men has been given to the Son is this; because that while equal to the Father, as being the Son of God, he has taken our flesh, and as being "born of a woman," is also the Son of Man; whereby He became especially fitted to be the judge of mankind.

From this mention of himself, as the Judge of all men, Jesus took occasion to declare the certainty of that judgment, which he will hereafter hold upon all the world. He told his hearers not to be astonished at what he was saying on this subject; for that a time would come, in which every person who had died from the beginning to the end of the world, should hear His voice, and come out of their graves. He said that there should be two kinds of resurrection for them: one he calls "the resurrection of life," which shall be for those who have lived in the practice of good things; the other he calls "the resurrection of damnation," which shall be for those who have lived in the practice of bad things. He declares that the judgment he will deliver, shall be altogether just; in his sentence, he will do nothing partially, but according to the things which are brought forward in the case of each: for that he will act in this great office, according to his Father's will who sent Him, and who is a just God; and not according to any will of his own, as different from that of the Father.

According to the law of Moses, the testimony of two persons was necessary to prove every important matter (Numb. xxxv. 30; Deut. xvii. 6; xix. 15; John viii. 17; Heb. x. 28.); and in all affairs

of law, a man's account of himself, or of his own case, was not considered of any value in finding out the truth concerning him. After making such a statement about himself as he had done, Jesus referred to this rule of Law; and said that, if his were the only testimony to his claim to be honoured as the Son of God, his statement would not be received in law as true. But even in this point of view his claim had been fully confirmed by another witness, whose testimony concerning him was undoubtedly true. The Jews might remember that they themselves had sent to John the Baptist, when he was preaching in Bethabara (John i. 19—28; see vol. i. p. 137.); and that John had told them the truth concerning himself. Jesus however did not mean that his claims to be worshipped and honoured should depend for proof upon what any man could say about him; but he only made use of this argument for the sake of those to whom he was speaking, as a means of convincing them of the truth, that they might believe it, and be saved. John (he said) by the doctrine he taught, and the life he led, had been like a candle lighted up, to be a shining light; and for a little time, the Jews were pleased with the new doctrine, and thought highly of John—thus rejoicing in his light. But Jesus had a greater means of proving the truth of his claims than any thing John could say. The miracles which God the Father had appointed for Him to bring to pass, some of which he had already performed, these afforded a plain proof, that He who could do such things must have come from God. Moreover God the Father, who sent him as a man, upon earth, had Himself given a plain proof who he was, by speaking from

heaven at his baptism, calling him His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. (vol. i. p. 117.) Having thus referred to the wonderful things that took place at his baptism, Jesus asked the Jews whether they had neither heard the voice with which God the Father spoke on that occasion, nor seen the shape of a dove, which God the Holy Ghost took at the same time. (The words which stand in the 37th verse “ Ye have neither heard,” ought rather to have been “ Have ye neither heard ?”) (Matt. iii. 16, 17. Mark i. 10, 11. Luke iii. 21, 22.)

And again, our Lord told the Jews, that God’s word did not make any impression upon them, so as to dwell or keep in their minds when they read it; for when God sent the person whom, in that Word, he had promised, they would not believe him to be sent from God. They were in the habit of very diligently studying the Books of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms ; that is all the Old Testament (Luke xxiv. 44): for they considered, in these holy scriptures they had the means of eternal life. These very scriptures taught about him as the Christ ; and yet these Jews who thus studied them, would not come to him that they might obtain that eternal life which they professed to be seeking.

Jesus then told them that he did not stand in need of the worship given by men ; but he thoroughly knew their hearts, and that they had no love of God in them. He had come in the name of God, according as it had been foretold in the Scriptures, and yet they would not acknowledge him. They had got false notions of the promised Messiah, suited to the proud and worldly thoughts of men : and if any body were to come and pretend to be such

a Messiah as suited their fancied notions, such a one would be received by them. No wonder they did not believe Jesus, since their hearts were set upon receiving praise and honour from each other, and had no desire for that true honour which God only can give.

Our Lord closed this important discourse by telling the Jews, that it would not be necessary for him to bring an accusation against them to the Father; for that the writings of Moses, in which they placed so much trust, would of themselves be enough for that purpose. If they had a real faith in the books of Moses, they certainly would have believed Jesus, for Moses wrote about him. If however they had not a right faith in the Old Testament Scriptures, it was not likely that they would believe what he himself said to them.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture: see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. This portion requires much prayerful consideration; it is one of the strongest and plainest statements that Christ is equal with God: which is a matter we are by no means able to understand, and therefore the proper receiving of it is one of the best proofs of faith and of humility. The great truth that our Saviour Jesus Christ, is the Son of God, and equal with the Father, was stated by St. John in the beginning of his Gospel. (see vol. i, p. 93) It was shewn plainly at the baptism of Jesus (see vol. i, p. 109); Christ spoke in such a way as to let this great doctrine be taken for granted, when

he drove the traders out of the court of the temple, at the beginning of his ministry (see vol. i, p. 160); and before he delivered the discourse in this portion, he had done many miracles to prove His Divinity. (see vol. i, pages 153, 203, 223.) Here, however, it was declared by our Lord in the plainest manner, and by many different modes of expression. Whatever devices may be used in these days to put any other meaning to the words of this discourse, the persons who heard them spoken by Jesus, certainly understood them to mean that God was his Father, and that he thereby made himself equal with God. And Jesus not only permitted them to understand him thus, but confirmed their opinion by still stronger statements. To deny therefore that Christ is the Son of God, equal with the Father, is in fact to charge him with being a deceiver, and a blasphemer; and no person who does not believe this doctrine can have any reasonable hope of being saved by that person whom they thus treat as a blasphemer.

QUESTIONS.

Do I willingly and heartily receive the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, equal with the Father?

Do I resist the attempts of my mind to enquire how this can be? and do I humble myself, acknowledging that this is a matter for me to believe, without attempting to understand it?

2. While on the one hand our Lord so plainly declared that he was the Son of God, equal with the Father—it is on the other hand also as plain, that He was made man, and as such is become to us as a brother in the flesh. This great and astonishing mercy he declares to be the reason why he is the appointed Judge of mankind, rather than the Father. A true belief in his words, and a proper attention to them

ought to produce in us a continual remembrance, and an awful sense, of the judgment to come. When we consider that the Judge, though he possesses the power of God, is at the same time a man, we cannot but feel how much God has done to convince us of the impartiality of the judgment; and of the certainty that the sentence will be executed.

QUESTIONS.

When I think of the Son of God having become a man, do I remember that he is also appointed to be my Judge? and does this lead me to consider the circumstances of the judgment more particularly?

3. Christ referred to several ways in which it was proved that he was the Son of God. He mentioned what John the Baptist had said about him, the miracles which He had done, and would do—the wonderful things which happened at His baptism—and the accounts given of Him beforehand, in the Scriptures the Old Testament. In our Gospel days, (when we have the New, besides the Old Testament, in which these things are stated) all the proofs referred to by our Lord are to be found in "THE SCRIPTURES": and, therefore, as He placed before the Jews, the duty of diligently studying the Scriptures, as the means of obtaining only one of these proofs, how much more necessary and important must it be, for us to study the Bible diligently, since it contains them all. But the Jews were hindered from believing, by seeking the praise and honour of men, rather than that which comes from God. And now too, the same reason often prevents those who read their Bible from profiting by it, as much as they might do; if, instead of attending to the

opinions of men, (and reading merely to gain knowledge, which may procure advantage and credit amongst men), they would give up their hearts simply to the teaching of God's Spirit, for the purpose of becoming such as pleases Him.

QUESTIONS.

How often do I read the Bible; and for what purpose do I read it at all?

Is it that I may be strengthened in believing on Christ, and in living as he would have me to live? Or,

Is it merely from habit, as a Sunday duty? for the purpose of shewing that I know it better than others?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to have a simple faith in the great mysteries of religion, particularly in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Pray to be kept from proud or unbelieving thoughts concerning those things which you cannot understand.
3. Ask to be kept in continual remembrance of the solemn judgment to come, and of the blessing of having the Son of Man for your Judge.
4. Ask for grace to feel always interested in studying the Bible, and pray that the Holy Spirit may make you profit by your reading, without being puffed up by your knowledge.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Almighty God, who alone canst teach men those things which belong to thy Divine Nature, give me grace to receive the truth of those wonderful things, which Thou has told us concerning thyself, with the same simplicity with which a little child receives the instruction of its parent. Especially enable me to receive thee, O Lord Jesus, as my Lord, and my God, [2] Keep me I pray thee, from the foolishness of leaning to my own understanding in those things which are above me, and preserve me from all unbelieving thoughts—Lord, I believe;

Luke informs us. God had commanded that, on the second day of the Feast of the Passover, the first sheaf of ripe corn that was gathered in of the harvest should be brought into the temple, and given to the priest as an offering to the Lord ; in token that the whole of the harvest belonged to Him, and that the people received it from His free bounty. This was called the wave-offering, because the priest, when he received it, waved, or moved it backwards and forwards in the air, before the Lord. Until this had been done, the law forbade any person from using even a single ear of the new corn. After this the work of reaping began ; and this second day of the Passover was the day from which was counted the seven weeks for that other great feast, called the feast of weeks. (Lev. xxiii. 9—16; Deut. xvi. 9.) The Greek word, which in Luke vi. 1. is called the “second sabbath after the first,” means rather “the first after the second.”) It was the first sabbath after this day on which the wave-offering had been offered, that our Lord and his disciples were walking through the corn-fields, just after harvest had begun, and before much of the corn could have been reaped.

The Jews' sabbath began at six o'clock on Friday evening : and probably the disciples had been attending all day to their Master's teaching, without having eaten any thing ; and being now very hungry they gathered a few of the ears of ripe corn, and rubbing off the chaff between their hands, they eat the grain. A number of people followed our Lord in his walk ; and amongst them there were some of the Pharisees, who were anxiously upon the look out to catch him doing or saying something wrong. When they saw his disciples take

these ears of corn, they chose to consider it an act of labour ; as if they had reaped some corn : and they asked our Lord why His disciples broke the sabbath, by doing work on that day. Jesus immediately referred them to the Scriptures ; and asked them whether they had never read that part of the history of David, in the twenty-first chapter of the first book of Samuel. When David was escaping from the anger of Saul, he and the young men that were with him being very hungry and having nothing to eat, he went into the place appointed for the worship and service of God, at the time when Abiathar was the High Priest, and received those loaves called the *shew-bread*, which were placed regularly from week to week upon the table of the Lord, and were commanded to be considered most holy, and not to be eaten by any but the Priests alone. (Lev. xxiv. 5—9; Exod. xxv. 30.) David however eat them, and gave them to the people who were with him ; and their necessity warranted the Priest in giving them the bread.

But perhaps the Pharisees might say that, though the holiness of the shew-bread was an appointment of God, it was not like the sabbath. To meet such an objection as this, our Lord again referred them to the Scriptures ; and asked them whether they did not know that, by Law, the Priests were required to offer sacrifices in the temple, and to do other works, upon the sabbath-days ; and that they were not to be blamed for so doing. (Num. xxviii. 9, 10 ; John vii. 22.) Still the Pharisees might have thought, that works done in the temple were different from works done out of it. Our Lord however declared His divine authority in this matter, saying, that in that very place, (in the corn-fields

where they were then standing) there was One who was greater than the temple of God. He then told them, that if they had understood the meaning of that text in the Prophet Hosea, (vi. 6.) in which God declared that "He desired mercy rather than sacrifice," they would have known that He looks to the heart and motives of a person, rather than to the outward form of an appointed ordinance; and they would not have found fault with His disciples for doing that, in which there was no harm. The sabbath, he said, was appointed for the good of man ; and by its appointment it was not intended that, for the sake of mere outward observance, men should be so bound, as not to be permitted to get their food when they were hungry. He, who being the Son of God appointed the sabbath, having become the Son of Man, is still Lord and Master of the Sabbath ; and, as such, has power to permit what He chooses to be done on the sabbath-days, when he likes, and where he likes. (Gen. i. 26 ; ii. 1—3; John i. 1—3 ; Col. i. 14—16 ; Heb. i. 2, 3 ; Rev. i. 10.)

Soon after this had happened, Jesus upon another sabbath-day went into the synagogue and taught the people, as we have already seen it was his custom to do. (see vol. i. page 210.) Amongst the congregation there was a man whose right hand was dried up, so that he had no use of it. The Scribes and Pharisees, who were constantly watching Him to find fault, had seen Him cure so many persons of their diseases, that, as they did not acknowledge His Divine power, they considered that He made it *his business* to heal those who had any bodily affliction. The way in which he had made the man whole at the house of mercy (see forty-seventh portion, p. 38.) had led them to hope, that they might be able

to bring a charge against Him before the magistrate for sabbath-breaking, if they could find Him following his worldly calling (as they would consider it) on that day. With these feelings, they asked Him a question ; whether it was according to the law for a man to practise healing on the sabbath-days ? Jesus knew very well what were the motives which made them ask Him this question. Before he answered it therefore, He called to the man with the withered hand—He told him to leave his seat; and come forward to an open space in the middle of the congregation. The man did as he was desired, and then Jesus turned to the Scribes and Pharisees, and said that He would also ask *them* a question ; whether it was more according to the law for a man to do good things, or to do bad things on the sabbath-days—for a man to save another's life, or to take away another's life.

Jesus at that very time was about to do a good deed, and to give a man bodily life in his hand which had before been as good as dead. The Scribes and Pharisees on the contrary were at that moment planning how they might kill a man ; for such was their object in bringing a charge of Sabbath-breaking against Jesus, as the law would pass a sentence of death against a Sabbath-breaker. (see page 40.) They could not help feeling the truth of this, and therefore did not dare to answer him a word.

Jesus having convicted them in their own consciences, shewed them also (before he answered their question) the reasonableness of what he was about to do. He asked, if any one of them who had one sheep, were to find that sheep fallen into a pit on the sabbath-day whether he would not immedi-

ately do all he could to get it out again, although it were upon the sabbath day? A man is of much more value than a sheep ; and if they would be right in taking the trouble to relieve an animal on that day, much more would He be right in healing a sick man on that day. Having thus silenced every objection, He answered their question, and said, "it is lawful to do good upon the sabbath days".

We are told that our Lord turned upon these Scribes and Pharisees a look of anger: this was produced by the sinfulness of their conduct. But we are also told, that he looked at them with grief; when he considered how hard those hearts must be, which turned his very acts of love and mercy into occasions of being offended with him. He then spoke to the man who was standing in the middle of the congregation, and desired him to stretch out his hand. This was the very thing which, up to that time, he had not been able to do. But, believing that Jesus had power to give strength to his withered limb, he tried to do as he was bid. In so doing, he found the use of his right hand was restored to him, and that it was as strong and as well as his left hand.

The only effect which this act of divine mercy and power had upon the Scribes and Pharisees, was to fill them with great rage. They went directly out of the synagogue, and talked with each other to find out what would be the best plan for getting rid of Him. For this purpose too they called together the Council, or Sanhedrim. (see vol. i. p. 258.) They also consulted with the Herodians, who were a set of people that followed the particular opinions of King Herod. The Scribes and Pharisees did not at all agree with the Herodians

upon other matters, though they were glad to be joined with them in trying to destroy Jesus. (Matt xxii. 16. Mark viii. 15 ; xii. 13.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures : see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. This portion contains an account of our Lord's practical manner of shewing that the Fourth Commandment, in the true spirit of it, is part of that Law which He came to fulfil, and to teach his disciples to fulfil. (Matt. v. 17—20 ; Rom. vii. 13, 14 ; viii. 3, 4.) At the time when Jesus was upon earth, the sinful mistake which was most common amongst the Jews was, to lay too much stress upon the outward keeping of the Sabbath, while they neglected the spirit of it. At this time the common error lies all the other way ; and the keeping of the Sabbath, whether outwardly in form, or inwardly in spirit, is much too little considered. We have already seen that our Lord's own practice was to pay particular attention to the duties of the Sabbath Day. And in the great work of the atonement by His death and His rising again from the dead, it was so arranged, that he rested in a state of bodily death during the whole of the Jewish Sabbath Day. His example, therefore, sufficiently shews that He intended His disciples to fulfil the appointment, by which one day out of seven is hallowed, or set apart for God's holy service ; and that they should obey the command of that law of God, spoken with His voice and written with His finger, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." But this appointment, while it is for the glory of God, was also spe-

cially intended for the good of man. And it tends to neither one nor the other that people should be prevented, by a mistaken notion of the Sabbath, either from doing what is absolutely needful for their proper support, or from taking a fitting opportunity of doing good to their fellow-men. Our Lord therefore, who himself, as the Son of God, appointed and arranged the institution of the Sabbath, was pleased to shew us that He did not mean so to bind us up, as to make it sinful to eat when we are hungry on the Sabbath Days ; or to do such necessary things as we could not, in reason, be expected to prepare before-hand ; or to assist those around us, who may be in want or distress, by kind actions for their good. Works that are absolutely necessary, either according to the nature of things which God has ordered, or by the events of His Providence, cannot be considered as shewing that we rebel against God's Commandment. And works of kindness and love to our neighbours spring out of the very principle which God desires to encourage by the Sabbath ; for He has more pleasure in the spirit of love and mercy than in the outward form of obedience. Jesus Christ therefore plainly shewed that He did not object to such things as these.

But we must be very careful, lest while we take the liberty that Christ has been pleased to give us, we should neglect the duty which He requires us to fulfil. When He said that He himself was Lord of the Sabbath, he claimed it for his own day : and so He requires our services on that day, although as christians, he has set us free from many of the observances respecting it, to which the Jews were subjected. The duty of putting aside one day out of seven as holy, and belonging to God, began with

Adam, our first father. God bid the Jews "remember" this, when he delivered on Mount Sinai that law of the Ten Commandments, which, though first spoken to the Jews, was meant to bind every body in the world ; and by this law all persons are as much bound to keep the sabbath holy, as they are to love God—to honour their parents—to keep from blasphemy — from murder — from adultery— from stealing—from lying—or from coveting. As to the particular day, that is a point of less importance ; provided one day out of every seven be regularly kept holy. God took six days in making the world ; and having finished it, He stopped from creating on the *seventh*, or last day of the seven ; for which reason *that* was the particular day which was kept holy for a long time. When Christ became the "Son of man," he kept the sabbath on that day of the week ; and the last time he ever did this, was when his soul remained in the place of departed spirits and his body rested in the grave upon the seventh day of the week. But having thus, for the last time, honoured that day which brought to remembrance God's power and goodness in making the world, He, on the next day (that is, on the *first* day of the week) rose up, from that death by which sin had spoiled God's work, to restore things to a better state, by redeeming the world from sin : and this was a greater work than making it in the beginning. The first day of the week has therefore been called "The Lord's Day" ever since ; and has been kept by Christians as the one day out of seven which God, by the Fourth Commandment, requires to be set apart as holy. Christ tells us that the sabbath-day, of which he is the Lord and Master, was appointed for the good of

man ; and his wisdom has so arranged it, that the service which He requires of us on his day, is the very thing which does good to ourselves. For the worship and service of God and the study of His holy word, (which are the special occupations of the Lord's day) are the means by which our souls are prepared for the state of eternal happiness hereafter ; and this is the true good of man. Such a spiritual occupation as this is not hindered by such works as are absolutely necessary for our common wants ; and it is helped on by a christian attention to the good of our fellow-creatures. But such a worship and service cannot be carried on in the midst of worldly thoughts, desires, or business ; and therefore we must cast aside all such, if we intend to keep the Lord's day in the way which Jesus requires.

QUESTIONS.

What have been my opinions concerning the Lord's days ?

Have I considered them as belonging to God ; and that I have no right to do what I please on those days, but only what He appoints ?

Have I been satisfied with attending once (or perhaps twice) at Church, and thought that by so doing I had done enough to keep the sabbath ?

Have I considered the difficulty of keeping my mind fixed upon serious things, as a sufficient excuse for not considering these things at all on the sabbath-day ?

Have I thought it a light matter, that my mind is so apt to wander from serious things, both in Divine Service, and at other times in the course of the Lord's day ?

What are the works, which I permit myself to do because I think them necessary ? are they really necessary ? and if they are, could I not have managed to do them on Saturday, or can I not put them off till Monday ?

What works of love and charity am I in the habit of doing on the Lord's day ? and what are my motives for doing them ?

What works of worldliness, or business, am I in the habit of doing on the Lord's day ? and how do I excuse myself to my own conscience for doing them ?

Am I sensible that for my sins of sabbath-breaking I need the atonement of Christ ; and that without it I should be condemned for them ?

2 The perverse conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees mentioned in this portion, ought to be a great warning to us of the danger of giving way to prejudices, and of seeking to turn good into evil, because it crosses our inclinations. Nothing hardens the heart more, than resisting the means by which God would draw us from our own self-willed opinions. And the certain effect of fighting against the truth of God, when it happens to be contrary to our wishes, is to stir up a greater degree of passion and rebellion, and to make us more bold in sin, and less likely to turn from it. A sort of angry feeling often rises up in the mind of many persons against those doctrines of Scripture, which require them to give up the sinful practices and pleasures of the world ; or which take away the ground-work of their self-conceit concerning their own good works. This feeling is more likely to arise, where there is a secret conviction of conscience that the doctrines are true, without any inclination to submit to them as such. Persons who wilfully allow such a feeling to remain in their hearts, are just like these Pharisees ; and the same effect will take place in hardening the heart against the power and love of Christ Jesus, as appeared in their cases. It may not be shewn in the same manner, nor with such violence, but it will be as certain and as destructive. (2 Cor. ii. 15, 16 ; Rom. ii. 4, 5; Matt. xiii. 15; Job ix. 4; Prov. xxviii. 14; xxix 1.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I ready to attend to the first workings of my conscience? or have I ever tried to stifle and overcome its convictions?

Am I ready to give up any opinions, or any pleasures, as soon as I find them to be contrary to God's Word?

3. This is the only portion of Scripture in which Christ is said to have been angry; and in the same text he is said to have been grieved. We have here an example of that anger spoken of by the Apostle, when he tells christians to be angry without sin. (Eph. iv. 26.) Christ's anger justly and necessarily rises against *sin*—the evil of which is so dreadful, and of which He knew so much, as He suffered so much for it. But His heart, as a man, grieves for *sinners* who continue under the power of sin, and who will suffer the consequences. If a Christian be angry, it must be only according to this example of Christ. Whoever has the Spirit of Christ in him must always be angry against sin wherever he finds it; because sin is rebellion against God, and offends Him. But his anger must never become passion, or rage. These can only arise from a selfish feeling of being injured or offended personally. The Christian's anger against sin ought always to be restrained and softened, by a sincere grieving for the person who commits it; and thereby places himself in so much danger: and besides it will be so checked by the thought of his own sinfulness before God, that it cannot last long enough for the “sun to go down upon” it.

QUESTIONS.

Am I what is called of a quick temper: that is, am I soon angry with people who do wrong? If so, what is the motive of my anger? Is it that God is offended, or that I myself am injured?

Am I generally more grieved for the danger of a person who does wrong, than angry at the wrong he has done?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to have a right understanding of what God requires from us concerning the Lord's day.
2. Pray for grace to give up your whole heart and mind to His service on that day, and to profit by the appointment of the sabbath.
3. Pray to be kept from all unbelieving notions as to the sabbath ; and from all superstitious feelings concerning its observance.
4. Pray that you may have a tender and submissive conscience under the means of grace, and that you may be always willing to make your opinions and pleasures bend to the word of God.
5. Ask for grace to rule your temper, and that you may be more grieved for those who may act wrong towards you, than angry at the personal offence.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Lord God.—Creator of all things ; O Lord, Redeemer of the world, I thank thee that thou hast been pleased to appoint one day in seven for thy service ; and I beseech Thee to give me a right understanding how to perform that service according to thy will. [2] Give me grace that my whole heart and mind may be turned from all my worldly business and pleasure, on thy day, and may find true pleasure in thy service, that I may spiritually profit by the appointment of that sabbath, which thou hast made for the good of man. [3] Keep me, I beseech thee, from being disturbed by any doubts concerning thy law of the sabbath, that my obedience may not be shaken by unbelief. And preserve me also from the infirmity, by which my conscience may be hindered from the christian liberty set forth in thy holy Word. [4] Quicken my conscience,

I beseech thee, by all the means of grace which are afforded me; that I may be always willing to submit my mind to thy word, and my desires and pleasures to thy law. From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, Good Lord deliver me. Give me grace to hear meekly thy word, and to receive it with pure affection; [5] and enable me to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, especially in governing my temper; that whilst angry against sin, my anger may be overcome by grief, for the danger of my fellow-sinners. From envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord deliver me. By thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross and passion; by thy precious death and burial; by thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost, good Lord Christ deliver me.

Amen.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTIETH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. xii. verses 15 to 21 ; and St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iii. ver. 7 to 12.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

MATTHEW xii. verse

15, &c. withdrew himself *means here* went away

18, &c. judgement the Gospel

MARK iii. verse

9. throng him press him in a crowd

10. plagues very bad diseases

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

As Jesus found that the Scribes and Pharisees were trying all they could to do him harm, He thought it wise to go away from Jerusalem for the present ; and so he took a journey with his disciples to the sea or lake of Gennesareth. A great number of people came after him, from all parts of the country—from Judæa, and from the city of Jerusalem itself—from Idumea (which is that country commonly called Edom, in the Old Testament)—from the other side of the river Jordan—and from the neighbourhoods of the great cities of Tyre and Sidon. In all these parts there had been much talk of the great things that He had done, which made the people come after him. He had healed many persons ; and the consequence was, that those

who were afflicted with any diseases pushed forward to come near him, that they might touch him, and by that means be cured. This made such a crowd, and the people came so close to him, that he gave orders to his disciples to hire a boat, to be always in readiness ; so that when he found it necessary he might get into it, to keep clear of the crowd. Among the afflicted people who came to him were some that were under the power of evil spirits ; in the same way as that person whose case is mentioned in Mark i. 23—26, and Luke iv. 33—35 ; see vol. i. p. 223.) These persons as soon as they came near enough to see Jesus, fell upon their faces before him ; and the evil spirits which were in them made them cry out that He was the Son of God. He however commanded them not to do this ; and also told the people who had been healed, that they were not to go about and tell who He was. Most likely his reason was, that he might not unnecessarily increase the rage of the Scribes and Pharisees against Him. By not resisting their violent conduct, nor taking advantage of the people's feeling towards him for the purpose of raising a riot against them, he proved the truth of the character which is given of him in the prophecy of Isaiah (chap. xlii. ver. 1—3.), where Jehovah declares beforehand, that he will send Christ, His own Son, to become a man, and appear as a servant. (Phil. ii. 6, 7.) As such, God says He will choose him, and delight in him (Matt. xvii. 5) ; that He will give him his Spirit (Matt. iii. 16, 17) ; and that he shall teach not only the Jews, but also the other nations of the world, the true character of God, and the Gospel of Salvation. (This is what is meant where it is said “He shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles.”) The charac-

ter of Christ is then described in the prophecy thus, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets"; or, as it is repeated by St. Matthew, "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets": by which is meant, that when Christ came, he would not take the common worldly means of obtaining power, by resisting those who opposed him, and raising a multitude to cry out in his favour. On the contrary, He would not put the finishing stroke to the destruction of any one, by forcing on that which is evil, or putting out the last remains of that which is good. This is expressed by two comparisons: that when a reed is bruised, He will not break it quite; and when the flame has gone out of an oil-lamp, so that the wick is only smoking (like the bright snuff of a candle that has been blown out) he will not put out the last spark. It is also said that, in spite of this gentle, quiet conduct, he will certainly overcome all his enemies, and succeed in his great work; so that the Gospel shall be preached all over the world, and the people of different nations shall believe in his name.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures: see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. It was the wisdom of Jesus to get out of the way of those who turned his good deeds into occasions for their evil ones. Neither would he have the people whom he had healed stir up his enemies, by talking unnecessarily of his power. This is a great lesson to Christians; many of whom are apt to think, that, in a right cause, which some people may be obstinately opposing, we need not care whether our manner of acting stirs them up to further evil or not. We may gather from our

Saviour's conduct here, what ought to be the rule of ours in such a case. It should be our endeavour to do whatever may be necessary to shew the real principles upon which we act ; but so to do this, as not to give any unnecessary occasion for others to increase their sin. This rule will be very useful, whenever we have any thing to do with passionate people; that we may not do any thing which makes them more angry, unless duty requires us. Or, with false and dishonest people; that we may not give them any occasion of adding to their falsehood, more than may be necessary to reprove and expose it. Or especially, when we have to do with persons who set themselves against true religion ; that we should not do any thing to make them increase their rebellion, or harden their hearts the more ; except what may be required for the purpose of proving that we ourselves stand on the side of God and of truth. When Jesus had worked the miracle which filled the Pharisees with rage (see last portion), we are told that he got out of their way. And so it will be always better, when we have acted in a christian manner, if bad feelings should be stirred up in any persons, that we should leave the evidence of our christian conduct gradually to work its way with them ; while we ourselves get away from the strife of tongues, which only increases evil. (Ps. xxxix. 1, 2.)

QUESTIONS.

How have I behaved, when any person has unjustly said or done any thing against me ?

Have I been determined to get the utmost justice even against obstinacy and insult ?

Or, have I acted calmly so as to shew that I was right, and left my conduct to answer for itself ?

2. It is part of the character of Christ so beautifully described in the Prophet, that he "does not

break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax"; We have seen that this means, that he does not put the finishing stroke to any one, by forcing on that which is evil, or putting out the last remains of that which is good. If this had not been the character of Christ, which of us could now have any christian hope at all? How many times have the evil of our own hearts, or the temptations of the world, almost overcome the working of the Spirit of God within us; and so hindered us from letting our light shine before men, that our conduct has seemed to have hardly a spark of religion in it? If Christ had treated us as we deserved, and the Holy Spirit, being grieved, had left us, that spark would have been put out altogether; and we should have become like those unhappy persons, who "know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;" who "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." How many times have our sins made it necessary for God to strike us with some heavy blow of correction or put us into some painful and difficult trial. And while thus pained and bruised, how often have we murmured, and tempted God to break us down altogether by some fresh blow. And why has not this been the case? Only because the kindness and gentleness of our Saviour Jesus Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor put out the smoking flax: and the remembrance of this mercy should be one of the strongest reasons for increasing our love to such a Saviour, and our willingness in His service.

QUESTIONS.

Have I often considered, how great has been God's mercy to me, in not driving me on to the sins I have wished to commit and not increasing the trials at which I have murmured?

Does this consideration lead me to greater love for Christ,—greater watchfulness against temptation—and greater submission in trouble?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a calm spirit, when you are injured or opposed. And especially that, in defending yourself, you may not unnecessarily stir up others to sin.
2. Praise God for the tender mercy He has already shewn you, in not treating you as you have deserved.
3. Ask for Grace, that you may never grieve the Holy Spirit, nor murmur at the trials to which God's Providence calls you.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O merciful Saviour, who didst return good for evil; and who desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live; give me, I pray thee, of thine own Spirit, that when any do evil to me, I may calmly meet their evil with good. Teach me especially how to defend the truth in such a way, as may not cause those who are in error to increase their sin by opposing it.
[2] I praise thee, gracious God, for all thy love and mercy towards me. I praise Thee, gracious Saviour, that thou hast not broken the bruised reed, nor put out the smoking flax. And I humbly beseech Thee, mercifully to look upon my infirmities, and for the glory of thy name turn from me all those evils which I most truly have deserved. [3] And grant me grace, that I may never resist the Holy Spirit nor grieve him by sin, nor murmur at the trials to which thou art pleased to call me: but that, in all my troubles I may put my whole trust and confidence in thy mercy, and evermore serve thee in holiness and pureness of living, to the honour and glory of thy name, O Blessed Jesus, my Lord and Saviour. AMEN. Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-FIRST PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. x. ver. 2 to 4; and St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iii. ver. 13 to 19; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vi. ver. 12 to 19.

III. THE MEANINGS :

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

MATTHEW x. verse

4, &c. betrayed him *means here* gave him up by deceit

MARK iii. verse

14. ordained solemnly appointed to be

LUKE vi. verse ministers

16. traitor one who acts falsely when
he is trusted

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

It was at this time of our Lord's life upon earth, that he was pleased to appoint his twelve Apostles; and to set them apart in an especial manner for the great work upon which he afterwards employed them. As this was one of the most important matters which He had to do, we find that he prepared for it in the most solemn manner. He went in the evening to the top of a high hill, and there he remained all the night long, engaged in prayer to God. It was a common custom for the Jews to build small chapels in retired places; generally upon

the tops of hills. These were left open always, for the use of such persons as might desire to occupy themselves in devotion. It was probably in one of these that Jesus passed the night upon this occasion.

Early in the morning, our Lord desired his disciples to come to him. When they were come, he chose twelve out of the whole number. He took them just as he pleased ; that is to say, not according to their age—nor their circumstances—nor their goodness ; but according to his own pleasure, as St. Mark particularly informs us. These twelve He ordained : that is, by his power and authority, he made them his ministers. And he appointed them to remain with him at all times ; that they might be properly prepared against the time when he should afterwards send them all over the world to preach the Gospel, and to shew their authority in his name, by the power which He would give them to heal people who were sick, and to send away evil spirits out of those who were possessed by them. To these twelve disciples he gave the name or title of Apostles ; which means, persons who are sent by another upon important business.

In choosing these twelve Apostles, our Lord included amongst the number those five persons, whom as (we have seen) he had already called to follow Him. In this portion of Scripture we find them arranged in pairs, and they were afterwards sent out two and two. The following is the list of them.

1. SIMON. He was the son of a man named Jona-b, and is therefore called Bar-Jona ; Bar meaning son. (Matt. xvi. 17 ; John xxi. 15—17.) This is the person who was brought to our Lord by his brother Andrew, at the time when John the Baptist pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of God. (John i. 35—43 ; see vol. i. p. 146.) At that time our Lord

declared that he should *afterwards* be called by the name of Cephas, or Peter ; both which words mean the same thing — a stone, or rock. And now upon ordaining him to be an Apostle, he fulfilled what he had then declared, by giving him the name of Peter. Accordingly, from this time forward, when he is mentioned in the Scriptures, we generally find him called Peter ; whereas before this, he is almost always spoken of as Simon. He, and his brother Andrew, were the two first disciples whom Jesus had desired to follow Him. They were fishermen by trade, and had followed that business until our Lord desired them to attend upon Him. (see vol. i. p.219.) Peter is always mentioned as the first of the apostles.

2. ANDREW was the brother of Simon, and was called by our Lord at the same time with him.

3. JAMES was the son of Zebedee. He has been called “the greater,” to make a difference between him and the other apostle called “James the less,” who was the son of Alpheus. He was also a fisherman by trade, and had been called upon to attend our Lord on the same day that Simon and Andrew were. (see vol. i. p. 219.) It was this James who was afterwards killed “with the sword” by King Herod. (Acts xii. 1, 2.)

4. JOHN was the brother of James, and had been called at the same time with him, being engaged in the same occupation as fishermen. John was that apostle for whom our Lord expressed a particular affection, and who is therefore spoken of as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He is the person who wrote the fourth Gospel, called therefore the Gospel according to St. John (see vol. i. p.3.) He also wrote three letters which are found in the New Testament : as the First, Second, and Third Epistles of John.

He outlived all the other Apostles, and in his advanced years our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him, and delivered to him that wonderful prophecy which John wrote down by His order ; and which is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ ; but, being given to this apostle, it is also entitled the Revelation of St. John the Divine. (see vol. i. p. 2.)

Our Lord was pleased to give a particular name to these two brothers, calling them Boanerges, the meaning of which word is, "the sons of thunder." Most probably He did this, because of the earnest zeal which they shewed in the cause of their Master.

5. PHILIP. He was the person whom Jesus had taken with him into Galilee, when he first went there, before the marriage which He attended at Cana. He belonged to the town of Bethsaida, the place where also Andrew and Peter had lived. (see vol. i. page 146.)

6. BARTHOLOMEW. There is great reason to believe that this person was the same Nathanael, who had been brought to our Lord by Philip, and of whose faith Jesus spoke so favourably. (John i. 44 — 51 ; see vol. i. p. 147.) It was very common for people in those days to have more than one name (see forty-sixth portion, p. 30) ; and others of the apostles, who certainly had two names, are mentioned sometimes by one and sometimes by another. It is not therefore strange that this man should be called only Bartholomew in one place, and only Nathanael in another. Though the Scripture does not expressly say that they were the same persons, yet we may gather several reasons from the Scripture for thinking so ; and so it was thought by those who lived in very early times.

7. THOMAS. He was called also DIDYMUS, which

in the Greek language means "a twin," as does also the word Thomas in Hebrew. (see John xi. 16; xx. 24; xxi. 2.)

8. MATTHEW. This was the apostle who wrote the first Gospel. (see vol. i. p.2) His name was also Levi; he had been a publican, and had been called not long before by our Lord from his business to be one of His disciples, and to follow Him. (see 46th portion, page 30.) In mentioning his own name amongst the Apostles, he calls himself "the publican," and puts himself after Thomas—though in the other Gospels he is put before him. His father's name was Alpheus.

9. JAMES. This James was the son of a man named Alpheus, who was not however the same person as the father of Matthew. The name of Alpheus and Cleopas were the same. And this Alpheus or Cleopas, was married to Mary, who was a sister or cousin to Mary the mother of Jesus (see vol. i.p.161): for which reason, James, her son, is called our Lord's brother. (Gal. i. 19.) He is the person who wrote that letter in the New Testament, which is called the General Epistle of James. To distinguish him from the Son of Zebedee, he has generally been called "James the less": (Mark xv. 40.) after our Lord's death, he was made bishop of Jerusalem, where he was called James the Just, because of his excellent character.

10. JUDAS the brother of James, as he is called by Saint Luke. In the language which was talked in that country at that time, the name "Judas" was called "Thaddeus," and both St. Matthew and St. Mark in putting down the name of this Apostle call him by that name; in the two first Gospels he is join'd with his brother James; but St. Luke puts him with his name-sake (very likely because they

had the same name). The word Thaddai or Thaddeus means the heart or breast, and Lebbeus means much the same thing. St. Matthew says that St. Jude was called by both these names: and very probably his name was thus mentioned in writing the Gospels, after our Lord's death, on purpose to make a difference between the faithful and true character of this apostle, and the false and heartless character of the other who had the same name.

11. **SIMON.** As this Apostle had the same name as Peter, another name was added to distinguish him, and it was one which expresses his earnest warmth in the cause of Christ. He was called "Simon the Zealous." This same thing is expressed by two different names, according to the different languages from which the words are taken. St. Matthew and St. Mark in their Gospels call him "the Canaanite;" which does not here mean that he belonged to the country called Canaan, but it means (in the language then spoken) that he was a zealous man. And St. Luke, both in his Gospel, and in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts i. 13.), calls him Zelotes"; which in the Greek language means the same thing.

12. **JUDAS ISCARIOT.** This is the apostle who made a secret bargain with the Chief Priests, to give up Jesus into their hands. (Matt. xxvi. 14-16; Mark xiv. 10,11; Luke xxi. 3-6.) For this reason he is said to have "betrayed Him," and is called "the traitor"; which means one who acts falsely when he is trusted. His name of Iscariot is not like the second names of the other apostles, which express their characters in an honourable way. "Iscariot" added to the name of this Judas only shews that he was born at the town of Kerioth. (Josh. xv. 25; Jer. xlviii. 24, 41; Amos ii. 2.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures. See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

The way in which our Lord prepared for the ordaining of his Apostles, ought to lead our minds to two important considerations.

1. We ought, first, to consider how important a thing that must be, for which He thought it necessary to prepare, by passing the whole night in prayer. He was about to appoint those ministers of the Gospel, who were to be the first of a course of ministers, by whom the knowledge of his great work of salvation was to be taken all over the world, generation after generation. He was going to prepare the instruments by which millions of souls were afterwards to be saved. In this country, where the religion of Christ is established, and where his ministers are to be found in every parish, this appointment of our Lord is much less thought of than is reasonable, or safe. The ministry of the Gospel is appointed as a means by which that Word which is able to save our souls (Jas. i. 21.) is brought within our reach, and laid before us, that we may believe it, and thereby profit by it. To receive this great thing as a common matter of course, and of little value, seems very like despising that which our Lord considered to be extremely important and valuable (Luke x. 16); and it is one sign, that a sense of the great mercy of Christ in dying to save us, and in sending us the knowledge of that salvation, has not taken its due hold upon our affections.

QUESTIONS.

In what light have I hitherto considered the ministry of the Gospel, which Christ has placed within my reach?

Do I value it as one of the most important blessings I have? And do I endeavour to profit by it as such?

2. The second consideration arising from the

way in which our Lord prepared for ordaining his apostles, is that it shews us how we ought to enter upon every important action of our lives. If it was proper for Jesus to pass a whole night in prayer to God, before taking a step which influenced the salvation of future generations (and of ourselves amongst them), how necessary must it be for us to pray to God earnestly for direction and guidance in every business which we have to transact. We are all apt to be swayed by our own interests and feelings; and nothing but the Spirit of God can enable us wisely to consider all the points which ought to influence our conduct. We cannot tell what may be the consequences of that which we plan; and nothing but the Providence of God can make our best arrangements turn out well. (Prov. xvi. 1, 3, 9, 38.) It is therefore our best wisdom, as well as the command of Scripture, that "in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we should let our requests be made known unto God." (Phil. iv. 6.)

QUESTIONS.

Have I been in the habit of praying about every thing that seems of consequence in my life, before I set to work about it?

Do I determine what to do first, and then pray to God for a blessing? or do I pray for wisdom first, in order that I may ask for the blessing with more confidence afterwards?

3. We are especially told, that in ordaining his apostles, Christ called unto him "*whom he would.*" The same thing happens to this day: for we find that in the Providence of God, very different sorts of persons are duly appointed to the preaching of the Gospel. Many people however expect to have the ministers whom *they* will, rather than whom CHRIST wills, and this choosing for themselves what kind of person should teach them, is too often a sign, that in secret they choose also for themselves the kind of teaching they will receive. Some shew this by a self-willed

determination to wander away from the appointed minister, that their "itching ears" may be pleased. (see 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.) Others, without going so far as to do this, take great liberties in finding fault with the teaching of their ministers, without having been at the pains to examine whether it is according to the word of Christ or not. Others dislike his manner, and so shut their hearts against the teaching. Others quarrel with the faithful "reproving and rebuking" which the ministers of Christ are commanded to use, (2 Tim. iv. 2.) And some are even so foolish as to turn from the ministry, because of some personal offence which they take with the minister. All these errors might be avoided, by properly considering, that Christ appoints *whom He wills* as his ministers, and that the duty and advantage of the people is to receive and profit by the Gospel of salvation, as Christ sends it, without making the person by whom it is sent an occasion of hindrance or stumbling.

QUESTIONS.

What are my feelings toward the minister of Christ, duly appointed to instruct me? Do I like him, or do I dislike him?

Do I look on him with the respect due to his office? or do I let my particular view of his manner or his circumstances, hinder me from treating him as a servant of Christ?

Am I wilful in desiring to choose my own minister? or am I willing to be taught by the minister who is appointed by the Church, as being chosen of God.

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a due sense of the great importance of the ministry of the Gospel to yourself and to those amongst whom you live.

2. Ask to have a constant spirit of prayer given to you, that in all things you may apply to God, to guide, direct, and prosper your undertakings.

3. Pray for your own minister; and ask for such a sense of his high office, as may enable you to overcome every hindrance which his or your infirmity may place in the way of your profiting by his ministry.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Almighty God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the doctrine of salvation, through the blood of thine own Son ; give me grace truly to value that great blessing. And as thou hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone ; give me a due sense of the benefit of the ministry of thy word, as bestowed through those Apostles, and the persons whom thou hast appointed after them. [2] I beseech thee to fill my heart continually with an earnest spirit of prayer, that in all circumstances of my life I may come to thee, through Jesus Christ, for thine own Spirit, to give me wisdom to guide, direct, and prosper, all my undertakings. [3] Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who of thy divine providence, hast appointed divers orders in thy Church, give thy grace, I humbly beseech thee, to all those who are called to any office or administration in the same ; and so fill and renew them day by day with the truth of thy doctrine, and endue them with innocency of life, that they may faithfully serve before thee, to the glory of thy great name, and the benefit of thy Holy Church. Especially I beseech thee thus to bless him, whom thou hast appointed to be the minister by whom thy saving truth is taught to me ; and do thou impress upon me such a sense of the authority that he bears from thee, that I may not allow any infirmity in myself or in him to hinder my receiving the full benefit of his ministrations. I ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. AMEN. Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-SECOND PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, chapter vi. ver. 17 to 26.

III. THE MEANINGS :

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

LUKE vi. verse

18. vexed	<i>means here</i>	troubled
19. virtue	...	power
22. reproach	...	twit
24, &c.	woe unto you	you are unhappy
24.	consolation	comfort

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord, having now ordained his twelve apostles, came down with them from the top of the hill, where he had passed the night in prayer. Upon the plain ground, at the foot of the hill, he found all the rest of the persons who were in the habit of coming to hear his instructions. He therefore called his disciples together, with a great number of people who had come from the country of Judea, and the city of Jerusalem; and also from the places upon the sea-coast, by the towns of Tyre

and Sidon. This crowd of people came in the hope of hearing him preach ; and also that He might cure them of different diseases with which they were afflicted. Some also of those unhappy persons who were under the power of devils, called unclean spirits (see vol. i. page 223), came amongst the crowd. Our Lord was pleased to heal all these different people.—A wonderful power went out of his body, so that whoever touched him found the effects of this power in such a manner, that whatever his affliction or sickness might have been, he felt it no longer. (Mark v. 25—34.) The consequence was, that every body did all they could to come near enough to touch him.

After Jesus had done these wonderful things, He collected his disciples about him, and addressed a sermon to them. In this sermon he repeated many of those sayings which he had before spoken, in what is called "The Sermon upon the Mount." (see vol. i., 29th, and following portions.) What our Lord said in this discourse to his disciples upon the plain, is indeed like that other sermon on the mount in so many respects, that several learned men have thought that it could have been only the same discourse ; and that St. Luke gives a shorter account of it in this portion of Scripture, while St. Matthew gives a longer account of it in his Gospel. There are however many reasons for supposing that our Lord delivered the two discourses at different times ; though he taught, in a great measure, the same truths in both of them.

Upon this occasion Jesus looked at his disciples, who were most of them poor people, and told them, that the poor might consider themselves as happy ; for that, whatever might be the poverty of their

outward circumstances, theirs is the kingdom of God. By this he meant not only that the Gospel was to be preached to them, and that the hindrances to their receiving it are less than those which are found by the rich ; but also that God would especially bless with a richness of faith, many amongst those who were poor in this world's goods. It is not the being poor which, by itself, either makes them happy, or gives them the kingdom of God. It is only when poor people consider their poverty in the right way ; and make it the means of leading them spiritually to seek the true riches, that our Lord meant to call them blessed, or happy. (Isa. lxi. 1 ; Luke iv. 18 ; vii. 22, 23 ; Jas ii. 5 Rev. ii. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 6—8.) This he repeated in a different manner, by saying that those were happy, who are so badly off in this world that they could not get enough to eat ; for that the time would come, when they should have an abundance of all that can be desired, in that state of glory where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. It is not however of the mere circumstance of suffering from hunger in this life, that our Lord speaks ; but He means to call those happy who, while the comforts of this world are kept from them, have the true comfort from above. To such persons our Lord has promised in another place, that their hunger shall not be above what they can bear ; for those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, shall have all necessary things added to them. (Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16. Job. xiii. 15. Matt. vi. 33 ; Luke xii. 31 ; Rev. vii. 16, 17.)

Our Lord said that they are happy whose lot in this life is one which gives them occasion for tears ; for that the time would come when their sorrow

should be turned into joy. Every thing which is said in the other parts of Scripture proves that what our Lord speaks of here, is not merely a distress when we do not have our own way (which is a sorrow that is said to "work death") but that He speaks of that "godly sorrow" which produces such a turning to the salvation of Christ, as we are never disposed to turn from. (John xvi. 22; Heb. xii. 1-11; Psa. cxxvi. 5, 6; Jas. i. 2-4; Rev. iii. 19; 2Cor. vi. 10.) He said that they also are happy, whom people dislike and avoid so that they will have nothing to do with them; but abuse them and say false things against them, because of their following the religion of Christ. He told his disciples that when this happened to them, instead of being distressed at it, they were to be very glad, and take it as a matter of great rejoicing; because it is one of the signs that they are being prepared to receive that happiness in heaven, with which God freely rewards those who suffer for His sake here. (Isa. lxvi. 5; John xvi. 2; 2 Tim. iii. 12; Phil. i. 28, 29. 1 Pet iii. 14-17; iv. 12-14.) For it was in this way that the Jews in former times had treated the prophets who had been sent to them by God. (Mat. xxiii. 29-31. Heb. xi. 36-38.)

Having thus declared who are to be considered happy, our Lord made a contrast by saying, that persons in the circumstances exactly opposite from those he had just described, are to be considered unhappy. In contrast with the poor He described the rich; and said that they are unhappy. By referring to other parts of Scripture, where our Lord spoke upon the same subject, we know that He meant to say, that those rich persons are unhappy, who trust in their riches; and the reason which he gives in this sermon confirms this. They

are unhappy because they have no other enjoyment than what they find in those worldly comforts which they have received in this life, without having their hopes and affections in things above. (Mark x. 23—27 ; Job. xxxi. 24—28 ; 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, 17—19 ; Psa. lxii. 10 ; James v. 1—6 ; Luke xii. 15—21.)

In contrast with what he had said of "those that hunger now," He spake of those persons who enjoy all they desire in this world : and declared that they are unhappy, because they shall hereafter want the only thing that could make them happy. Mark viii. 36 ; 1 John ii. 15—17 ; Luke x. 42.) In contrast with those that weep now, our Lord spoke of those whose lightness of mind makes them seek nothing but laughter and merriment in this life ; He said that they are unhappy—for that the time will come, when their merriment would cease, and they would have only to mourn and to weep. (Eccles. ii. 1, 2 ; vii. 1—6 ; xi. 9.) In contrast with those who are hated for Christ's sake, He said that those are unhappy, who are praised and thought much of by every body ; that is, when they are in favour generally with the world ; for that when persons came to the Jews, and professed to be teachers sent from God, but taught them false things, every body praised these false prophets, who suited themselves, and their teaching, to the sinful desires of men, rather than to the word of God. (Isaiah xxx. 9—11 ; Jer. v. 30, 31 ; vi. 13, 14 ; xiv. 13—16 ; Ezek. xiii. 10, 16.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture. See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. In this discourse our Lord places happiness upon a very different ground from that on which we should be disposed to find it: and He calls those happy, whom men are apt to consider very miserable. Poverty and riches are looked upon here in the light in which they will be seen hereafter; when those who have passed their life either in the one or the other state, will look back from the other side of the grave, and understand their true value, while they are feeling the consequences which they have produced in eternity. To be poor, and in want, and sorrowful, and spoken ill of, is very uncomfortable to our natural feelings: but these things, when they are rightly received, as coming from the hand of God, to try the heart and to loosen it from the love of the world, are just the proper means of bringing us into a humble state, and making us seek the favour and help of God. While, on the contrary, riches, and plenty, and merriment, and kind speeches, are very pleasant to the natural feelings: but such things increase the difficulty of denying ourselves, and setting our affections upon things above; because they help us to indulge our desires, and are apt to puff us up with self-conceit, and make us set our hearts upon the enjoyment of pleasant things which are within our reach. If those who are poor and troubled now, look forward with a firm belief of the promises of God, it makes their poverty and trouble easy to be borne, because they know it will soon be over; and also profitable, because they know it is the way that God takes, to make them more fit for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. This however is not the case with those

who, in the midst of their poverty, are loving the things of this world, and grieving because they cannot get them; while they have no love for those heavenly rewards which are promised. Many poor people seem to suppose, that they are sure to be happy in the world to come, because they have a hard time of it in this world. But this is a very great mistake: the happiness of the world to come is very different from the enjoyments of this world; and those who look forward to be happy in heaven must have such repentant desires and inclinations, as will find their gratification in heavenly things. The Spirit of God often makes use of the trials of poverty, to increase and nourish such spiritual desires, as well as to keep the heart humble and self-denying: but if our poverty produces none of these effects, it does nothing to help us on our way to heaven; on the contrary, by bringing forth discontent and murmuring, as well as a proud conceit of being rewarded hereafter, it hinders that blessing which, if properly used, it might increase.

QUESTIONS.

(*For a poor person who is in want.*)

What effect has my distress upon my religious feelings? Does it make me neglect religion, because my mind is too full of my worldly troubles?

Do I murmur and complain that my lot is cast so low in this world?

Do I fancy that I have all my troubles here, and therefore shall have none hereafter? Or,

Do I submit to God's dealings with me; and thank Him sincerely for what I have?

Does my distress lead me to more earnest prayer, and trust in Him?

Does it make me search my heart, and acknowledge that, even at my poorest times, I am better off than I deserve from God?

Does this lead me to thank Him for chastening me now with trouble? and encourage me to hope that I shall receive hereafter the proof of his love in the salvation of Christ, who bore the true punishment for my sins?

2. The temptations of riches are much greater than those of poverty; and it will be plainly seen on the day of Christ's coming, that they who are poor, are in a more favourable situation for preparing for heaven, than those who are rich. The Scriptures which have been referred to in the explanation shew this: but faith and grace are the gift of God (Eph. ii. 8), and though it may be impossible for a man with his natural desires to resist the temptations of riches, yet the truth, that "with God all things are possible," is especially applied by Christ to the bringing of rich men into the kingdom of God. (Matt. xix. 23—26; Luke xviii. 24—27.) And the Holy Spirit has enabled multitudes of rich men to overcome all the temptations of their plenty, and to be the true and humble disciples of Christ. Those who are rich need not fear the "woe" spoken by our Lord in this discourse, if they seek the blessing which He gave to "the poor in spirit" in his Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. v. 3, &c.) Many poor people are apt to shew their envy at the advantages of those above them in this world, by applying our Lord's words in this discourse to all who are rich, without considering what use they make of their riches. Persons who do this prove that they do not understand how to apply to themselves that which is said about the poor, and especially about the poor in spirit. When we are contented with the circumstances in which the Providence of God has placed us, we shall not be ready to find fault with those who are placed in

other circumstances. They are wise who desire "neither poverty nor riches," but are satisfied with asking God for their daily bread, desiring only to be fed with food convenient for them. (Prov. xxx. 8.)

QUESTIONS.

For a person who is better off in the world.

Am I aware that by having plenty I am exposed to greater temptation than if I had not enough?

How do I use the advantages which God has given me? Do I keep in mind that I shall have to give Him an account of the way I have used them? and do I ask for grace to use them aright?

Do I seek to be poor in spirit—to be moderate—and to deny myself in those things which my plenty would enable me to enjoy?

For a person who is not so well off in the world.

Do I allow myself to think that those who are rich and above me in this world, are likely to be unhappy in the world to come, because they have their advantages here?

Do I feel this would shew a spirit of envy and of pride at my better hopes?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to keep in a moderate condition of life, and to be contented with the lot which is appointed you.

2. Ask for grace to make use of the trials of poverty and distress, for the purposes for which God sends them; and pray that they may be accompanied with His blessing.

3. Pray that, whenever the Providence of God gives you plenty of what you desire, you may use it in His service, and have grace given to you to be moderate and self-denying.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O God, who orderest all things by thy Providential care, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground; be pleased to appoint such things for me in this life as in thy wisdom shall seem best. Give me, O Lord, neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for

me—Give me a contented spirit, that in all the changes and chances of this mortal life, I may ever trust in thy gracious and ready help. [2] If it seem good to thee to appoint to me the trials of poverty and want, give me also grace to see thy hand in such dealings with me; and to profit by these trials according to the purpose for which they are sent: and to this end, let thy fatherly blessing accompany every chastisement of thy fatherly hand. [3] Whenever it is thy good will to give me abundance of those things which are needful for this life, teach me to act as thy servant, as entrusted with these things to be employed in thy service, and for thy glory. Give me grace to be humble, and to deny myself; and let my moderation be known unto all men. Preserve me thus from the “Woe” spoken of in this portion of thy word; and let me be of the number of those who are called “Blessed,” by my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-THIRD PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vi. ver. 27 to 49.

III. THE MEANINGS:

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

LUKE vi. verse

- 28. despitefully use you *means here* treat you ill for the purpose of vexing you
- 29. smiteth strikes
- 38. your bosom. the outer folding of your garment—as we should say, *your lap*
mete measure
- 39. a parable a story told for the purpose of making a comparison
- 41, &c. mote. splinter
beam prickle of a thorn
- 43, &c. corrupt. bad, good for nothing
- 45. treasure. store, or stock of things
- 48, &c. vehemently. violently, strongly

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

It has been already stated, that in this discourse, our Lord repeated many of those sayings which He had before taught in the Sermon upon the Mount: and it seems that He thought fit to choose out those particular doctrines, which shew the true character of the christiau religion to be far beyond every notion of goodness which men would naturally have

imagined. Such is the doctrine, that Christians are to love their enemies—not to judge of people's motives—to forgive injuries, &c. &c. Jesus sometimes expressed himself upon this occasion in the same words which he had used before; the explanation of these will therefore now be given in the same way as was done in the same parts of the Sermon on the Mount, to which the reader is referred.

We have seen that Jesus began this discourse by shewing who are to be considered happy or unhappy, though in a different manner from his former sermon: but he went on by declaring (as he had formerly done) that those who heard him (that is, who paid attention to what He said, and followed it) must love their enemies; that when others hate them, they are to do them good in return—That when any person speaks in an unkind manner to them, they are to shew the very reverse in their manner—and are to meet cursing with blessing—and that when they are ill-used, or treated in a vexatious manner, they are to make it an occasion of praying for the persons who treat them thus. (see Matt. v. 44, vol. i. page 282.) If a Christian should receive a blow on one cheek, so far from doing right in returning it, he ought rather to offer the other cheek for a second blow, than to take upon himself to avenge the first: and if He has one of his garments taken away from him, it would be better for him not to hinder the taking away of another garment also, rather than to act in a revengeful spirit. Christ told his disciples to be ready to give to every one who asked them for any thing which it was in their power to bestow: and if any one should take away what belonged to them, they are not to require in an unchristian manner, that their property

should be restored to them. (see Matt. v. 39, 40-42, and vol. i. page 275, 276.) He added, that in whatever way any one wishes that other people should behave to him, just in the same way ought he to behave toward them. (see Matt. vii. 12; vol. i. p. 337.)

Our Lord pointed out the reasonableness of this doctrine, by asking his disciples how they could expect that their conduct would be acknowledged as worthy of thanks, if they only acted upon the same principles, and in the same way, as those who were notorious sinners ; for even such persons love those who love them. If Christians do kind offices to those only from whom they receive kind offices themselves, how can they expect that this would be acknowledged as worthy of thanks—for wicked persons do as much as that. (Matt. v. 46, 47 ; vol i. p. 283.) If also Christians lend any thing only to those persons from whom they afterwards expect to receive benefit, how can this be acknowledged as worthy of thanks—for persons who do not pretend to act from the love of God, but go on in selfishness and sin, behave in the same way toward each other, merely upon the principle of self-interest. Christians, however, are to love their enemies — to do kind actions — and freely to lend what they have, without the expectation of benefit in return. Such conduct as this will establish for them a sure hope, that they themselves shall hereafter receive the free favour and great mercy of God ; and that having been born again, by receiving the Holy Spirit of God, they shall be the children of Him who is higher than all in the Heavens : shewing that they have the same disposition and character with His, as children are of the same nature with their father ; for He is kind to multitudes of ungrateful persons who never thank

Him for his kindness, but go on in the evil courses of sin. Because he who is the Father in Heaven is full of mercy; therefore those who are his children must, like Him, be full of mercy. (see Matt. v. 45; vol. i. page 282.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture at St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vi. verses 27 to 36.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Turn to Volume I, page 285, and read the application of that portion, Nos. 1 and 2: also turn to page 276, and read the application of that portion, Nos. 1, 2, and 3: also turn to page 340, and read the application No. 5, of that portion. The same applications should be made of this portion of Scripture.

IV. THE EXPLANATION. (*continued.*)

Our Lord next warned his disciples against forming uncharitable opinions about other people's intentions and motives, instead of attending to what he had said for the purpose of examining into their own. He tells us that we are not to judge other people; that is, when we see other people do anything that *may be* from a bad motive, or *may be* from a better one, we are not to settle it in our minds that the motive is the bad one, nor even to try other people's conduct by the strictest and severest rules and so to decide that they are guilty. He declared that the persons who took care to avoid this judging of other people, and deciding that their motives were bad, are the very persons who, for Christ's sake, should not receive the judgment of condemnation themselves hereafter. (Rom. ii.1; xiii. 8—10; Matt. vii. 1, 2. vol. i. page 338.) Jesus commands his disciples to forgive those who have offended them; and says that they who obey this command shall be those whose offences shall be forgiven by God. Jesus commands his disciples to be

liberal in giving what they can to others, and says, that such conduct shall be rewarded by much liberality towards them, from others. This our Lord expressed by saying, that whatever they received in the front folds of their outer garments (which it was the custom in that country to use for carrying things in) or, as we should say, in their laps, should be given to them by over measure in every thing — well shaken and pressed, if it were dry measure—and running over, if it were liquid: for that people would treat them as they treated others, and return them the same liberal measure which they gave.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture at St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vi. verses 37 and 38.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Turn to Volume 1, page 337, and read the application of that portion, No. 1: also turn to page 310, and read the application of that portion, No. 7. The same applications may be made of this portion.

IV. THE EXPLANATION (*continued*).

Our Lord then taught them by a comparison which is called a parable. If one man who was blind was leading another man who was also blind, would they not both of them fall into any ditch that lay in their way. By this comparison our Lord shewed, how foolish it is for ignorant persons to seek instruction from those who were themselves in ignorance; and he probably intended to warn them of the false teaching of the Pharisees, as He had done in the Sermon on the Mount. (see Matt. v. 20, 21, 27, 31, 33; vol. i. page 257.) At the time he gave this warning, however, he pointed out the necessity of being humble in receiving instruction. He said that a disciple, or person who is to be taught, is not to consider himself above the master, or person who

teaches him ; but that every person must learn perfectly what he is taught, before he can consider himself in the same light as his master.

To shew how unfit one sinner is to judge of the infirmities of a fellow sinner, our Lord made use of another comparison. Suppose there were two persons, one of whom had got a little splinter of wood in his eye, and the other a large prickle of thorn in his (Num. xxxiii. 55 ; Josh. xxiii. 13) ; how foolish would he who had the prickle be, if in pointing out the splinter in the other man's eye, he were to twit him with it, without feeling conscious that his own eye was in a much worse case because of the prickle. How could such a one offer to help his neighbour to get rid of the inconvenience ; when his own trouble of the same kind was such as to hinder him from being clear-sighted ? Such a man surely pretends to be able to do that for which he is not fit ; to cure, when in fact he has need to be cured himself. Our Lord calls him a hypocrite : and leads us to make the application of the comparison, by desiring him to attend to the means by which he may get rid of *his own greater evil* in the first place, that he may become better able to help in giving relief to others.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture at St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vi. verses 39 to 42.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Turn to Volume I, page 338 ; and read the application of that portion, No. 2. The same application may be made to this portion.

IV. THE EXPLANATION. (*continued*).

Our Lord then repeated the comparison which he had formerly made, for the purpose of shewing that persons are to be known by the doctrine they teach, and the conduct they pursue. It will never

be found that a tree of a good kind (a pear-tree, for instance, or a plum-tree) will bear a crop of worthless or common fruit (such as crab-apples or sloes); neither will a tree of a bad kind be found to bear good fruit, like peaches or plums. Every tree is known by the kind of fruit which it bears. No man would be foolish enough, to go to a thorn and expect to find figs growing on it. Nor would any one look for a bunch of grapes upon a bramble bush. So it is with men — a good man, who has received the Spirit of God in his heart, which makes his thoughts and desires good and profitable, talks and acts in such a good and proper manner as might be expected from such thoughts and desires. (2 Cor. v. 17.) A bad man, who rejects the Spirit of God, and whose heart therefore indulges evil thoughts and desires, (Gen. vi. 5; Jer. xvii. 9; Mark x. 18; Eph. ii. 3.) talks and acts in such an evil manner as might be expected from such thoughts and desires; for that, which a man's heart is full of, will certainly appear in his conversation. (Matt. xii. 33—35; xv. 18, 19; See Matt. vii. 16—20; and vol i. p. 348.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture: Luke vi. 43 to 45.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Turn to Volume I, page 351; and read the application to that portion, No. 2. The same application may be made to this portion.

IV. THE EXPLANATION. (*concluded.*)

Our Lord concluded this discourse by the same powerful comparison with which He had ended the former one. He asked the disciples why they called him their Lord and Master, without giving the only proof that they considered themselves to be his servants, by doing what he told them. He then shewed them the proper use to be made of all he had said, by

supposing that there were two men, each of whom built a house. One was a prudent sensible man, who looked forward to what might happen, and took care to dig deep, and to lay the foundation of his house upon a firm rock. The consequence was, that when heavy rains came, and the country was flooded by the rivers in the winter, the water rushed violently against his house, but it was not hurt; for the earth was neither loosened away from it below, nor the walls shaken from their firm hold. The other man had neither prudence nor forethought. He foolishly built his house upon the bare earth, without digging any foundation at all. When the heavy rains fell, and the rivers overflowed, the current of water dashed against it, and the whole house fell with a terrible crash, and was completely destroyed.

Our Lord said that those persons who come to him, and attend to the instruction he gives, taking care to do the things which he requires, are like the wise man, who built his house on a good foundation. While, on the contrary, those who being taught these precepts do not attend to them, but neglect to follow them, such persons are like the foolish man, who built his house without any foundation, upon the earth. (Jas. i. 22-25; see Matt. vii. 24-27, and vol. i. p. 353.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture; Luke v. 46 to 49.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Turn to Volume I, page 355, and read the application to that portion. The same application may be made to this portion.

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

Proper heads for Prayer to suit the different subjects of this discourse, may be found by referring to the same subjects in the Sermon on the Mount. See vol. i. ps. 285, 279, 341, 352, and 356.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

Those prayers may be used which suit the Heads for Prayer above referred to.

FIFTY-FOURTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. viii. ver. 5 to 13; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vii. ver. 1 to 10.

III. THE MEANINGS :

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

MATTHEW viii. verse

5, &c. a centurion *means here* a captain in the army of the Romans, having the command of 100 soldiers

LUKE vii. verse

1. audience hearing
3. the elders the heads of families
who were chief persons
4. instantly very earnestly

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

When our Lord had finished preaching the sermon to the whole multitude of people, of which an account was given in the last portion, he went into the town of Capernaum. It happened that an officer of the Roman army (one of those who were

called centurions, because each had the command of a hundred soldiers) was living there at the time, who had a servant very much afflicted with the palsy. The centurion had great affection for his servant, and was very anxious that he should be cured of his complaint. Though this officer was serving in the army of a heathen king, he had learnt something of the true religion, by living amongst the Jews. He liked that people very much, and was very kind to them ; so much so that he had built a synagogue for them, at his own expence. As soon as this centurion heard that Jesus had arrived at Capernaum, he went to the chief people of the town, who were called the elders ; and he begged them to go to our Lord, and entreat Him to restore the health of his favourite servant. The elders readily undertook to do what he wished ; they went directly to Jesus, and were very earnest in beseeching him to cure the servant. They told our Lord that the centurion deserved such a favour at the hands of a Jew ; as he had been so kind to the Jews, and had built their synagogue for them.

Our Lord made no scruple, but said he would go and cure the servant, and immediately went towards the house where the centurion lived. As he was coming near to it, the centurion was told what our Lord was kindly intending to do. Now he firmly believed that Jesus was come from God : probably from having heard of the manner in which our Lord, while he was at Cana, had by a word healed the son of a nobleman, who was lying sick with a dangerous fever, at this same town of Capernaum. (see John iv. 46—54 ; vol. i. page 204.) He felt a humble sense of what he was before God ; and therefore sent some friends to meet Jesus with a

respectful message, begging Him not to take the trouble to come to his house. He did not think himself worthy of such an honour as having the Lord to visit him ; he had not considered himself fit to appear himself in Christ's presence to ask the favour he wanted : but he knew, he said, that if Jesus, though at a distance, would but only speak the word, whatever He ordered would be done To shew how completely he believed in the Divine power of Christ, and that he had all things under his command, he bid his friends say, that he knew all things obeyed our Lord in the same manner that obedience was given to the different ranks amongst soldiers. He himself had officers above him, whom he was bound to obey, and had soldiers under him, who were bound to obey him : and when he gave the word of command, the soldiers acted according to it—when he told his servant to do anything, he did it

As soon as this message was delivered to our Lord, He expressed his surprise that such belief should be shewn by one who had been brought up a heathen : He turned round, and spoke to the crowd of Jews that followed Him, and declared that He had not met with any Jew who had shewn so much faith. Our Lord took this occasion of humbling the pride of the Jews, who boasted of the promises which God made to Abraham, as if they were only meant for those who were born his children in the flesh. The thought that any body but a Jew would ever be admitted into heaven, they could not at all bear. But Jesus told them that many people, from all parts of the world, east and west, should be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, upon an equal footing with Abraham, and with

Isaac, and with Jacob. (Gal. iii, 7—9; Gen. xii. 3; xxii. 18. Isa. lvi. 6—8; lx. 3. Acts. x. 34, 35, 43; xi. 17, 18; xv. 7—17. Rom. x. 11—13.

Our Lord not only humbled the Jews by thus declaring that souls should be converted from among the other nations of the world; but He added, that they themselves, who were Abraham's children—to whom the great mercies of the kingdom of God had been first offered, and who imagined that they alone were sure of being saved,—they themselves should not be admitted into God's presence, where is the fulness of light; but should be for ever sent away out of his presence, and therefore be in perpetual darkness; in a place where they should do nothing but weep, and gnash their teeth in useless rage and disappointment for not having taken advantage of the many opportunities afforded them.

Jesus then sent a message to the Roman officer, by the friends who had come for Him. He told them, that as sure as the centurion had believed his Almighty power, so sure what he had asked should be done. At the very moment that Jesus said this in the street where He had met the messengers, the servant who was lying sick in the centurion's house was cured; and when the friends returned to the house, they found him perfectly well.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures: see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. There are some parts in the character of this Roman officer which may be of great use as examples to ourselves; especially as our Lord spoke of him so highly. He had been brought up in the

greatest ignorance of true religion, and must have been always in the habit of attending the worship of idols. But when, by the Providence of God, he happened to be in a country where the people had the knowledge of the true God, he gave way to the force of truth ; and allowed it to overcome all his prejudices. This is a very useful example to those who are inclined to resist the power of true spiritual religion, merely because they may have been brought up amongst those who have spoken against it ; and who therefore feel ashamed or afraid of being any thing except what their fathers have been before them.

QUESTIONS.

Am I afraid of becoming more religious than the people amongst whom I was brought up ?

Am I a christian only because I was born in a christian land ?

2. The humility of this Roman soldier sets another example before us. He was in a situation to have command over others, which makes people apt to be proud of their command ; but the case was very different with this centurion. He had so high a reverence for Jesus, and so low an opinion of himself, that he did not think it decent or proper for such a one to go and ask a favour for himself, nor to have the honour of receiving our Lord into his house. Yet he was convinced, that there was no other way of getting what he needed, except by the power of Christ ; and therefore he humbly sent those whom he considered most honourable, to obtain what he wanted. This example may apply very closely to ourselves, now that Jesus is gone up to heaven to stand, as our friend, in the presence of God. A true christian should be convinced of the holiness and the power of God : he should have

a very low conceit of himself — so low as to make him wonder, that he could be allowed to come to God, by prayer; or that God should send His own spirit to make a dwelling-place of his body. (1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16.) This feeling should not make him turn away in despair; but, knowing the extreme importance of obtaining the spiritual blessings he desires, he should humbly take advantage of the merciful kindness of the well-beloved Son of God, who has promised to pray the Father for all those who avail themselves of his friendship. (1 John ii. 1; John xiv. 16; vi. 37; Matt. xi. 27, 28; Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12; Heb. iv. 14—16.)

QUESTIONS.

What state of mind am I generally in, when I kneel down to say my prayers?

Does the very thought of coming into God's presence by prayer, produce in me an humble feeling of my own infirmities?

Does it make me thankful that in Jesus Christ I have a friend and a brother, through whom I may ask what I need with confidence? and am I careful to make use of this great advantage as I ought to do, not repeating the words "through our Lord Jesus Christ" as a mere matter of course?

3. The centurion made use of the plain matters of fact in which he was constantly engaged, as a means of getting a clearer knowledge of the things of God. This he did when he applied the manner, in which the power and authority of men are used, as a means of understanding the way in which God's power over all things is employed. Many people neglect the instruction which they might obtain, if they would really set their minds to work for the purpose of better understanding heavenly things, by the help of those earthly things with which they are well acquainted. (John iii. 10-12.) Any persons who may

be sensible enough to follow the example of this wise centurion, might draw from almost all the things with which they are concerned every day, more useful instruction about God and spiritual matters, than they would gather from the reading of a great many books.

QUESTIONS.

Am I watchful to make use of my mind for the purpose of gaining spiritual instruction from my worldly concerns? Or, Do I make religion a matter to be considered by itself, and to be laid aside when I am engaged in worldly business?

4. Much comfort may be drawn from the way in which our Lord spoke of this humble and faithful centurion. When He said that he had not found so much *faith* amongst the Jews, who nevertheless had a great deal more *knowledge*, he gave us to understand, that our faith will be valued not by our profession, nor by our privileges; but by the power which it has over our hearts; and by the fruit which it produces in our conduct. Our Lord said that there would be many Jews, born to all the privileges promised to Abraham, who would nevertheless be cast out of the presence of God, in eternity; while many poor souls, who had been born as heathens, without privilege or promise, (Eph. ii. 12.) would be brought into the kingdom of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. And in like manner, we may be sure that many, who are born in a christian country, and baptized into the great privileges of Christ's church, by neglecting those privileges will lose the blessed advantages which they convey: while many of those whom they are apt to despise, as having been brought up in ignorance and sin, will, by a true turning of the heart to Christ's salvation, be saved in the great day of his coming.

QUESTIONS.

Do I pride myself upon my christian privileges, without taking into account in what manner I use them?

Do I consider those privileges as given to me through Christ's mercy to be used for his glory, in spite of my natural hindrances and great undeservings?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for grace to overcome any prejudices against spiritual religion, which you may feel from early habits: and ask for a spirit of diligence to search for truth, that you may be religious upon sincere conviction.

2. Pray for humility; and especially for a due sense of the great mercy, by which you may be admitted to God in prayer through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

3. Pray that you may have such a constant desire to advance in spiritual knowledge, as may lead you to take advantage of all your worldly concerns for that purpose.

4. Ask to be kept from the danger of resting your religious hopes upon outward forms and privileges: and pray for the true spirit of faith, that its fruit may appear in your conduct.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O God, whose property is ever to have mercy, and who wilt not visit with thy wrath those who turn from the evil way in which they have been before led; let me not be left in any error in which I may have been brought up, but make me diligent in searching for thy truth, and open my understanding to perceive it, and my heart to follow it, whatever may have been taught aforetime; so that I may be able to give to every one a reason of the hope that is in me.

[2] Make me humble, and lowly in my opinion of myself: specially teach me how unworthy I am to enter into thy presence, and make me duly value the blessing of the mediation of

thy dear Son, my Saviour ; who sitteth continually on thy right hand, to present my petitions at thy throne of grace. [3] May I continually remember that, whether I eat or drink or whatsoever I do, all things should be done to thy glory ; and give me grace and wisdom to use all things around me so as to increase my knowledge and love of thee. [4] Leave me not to depend upon the outward forms which I fulfil in worshipping thee, nor upon the privileges which thou hast afforded me as a means of making my calling and election sure ; but give me, I pray Thee, the true spirit of faith, by which I may find a living power in these forms and privileges, so that I may use them to thy glory, and my own salvation, through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-FIFTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. Amen.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vii. ver. 11 to 16.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

LUKE vi. verse

14. bier means here the thing on which a corpse
is carried to the grave
16. glorified gave honour and praise to

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

The day after our Lord had performed the miracle at Capernaum, which was told in the last portion, He took a journey to a town about twenty-five miles off, called Nain. Many of the persons who were regularly attending his teaching went along with him, and a crowd of people followed him.

It was the custom amongst the Jews to have their burying places outside of the towns. And it happened that just as Jesus was coming near the

entrance of Nain, a corpse was being brought out to be buried. It was the dead body of a young man whose mother had lost her husband, and had no other son than this one who had just died. She must have been a person much respected amongst her neighbours, for many of the people of the town were attending the funeral.

When our Lord saw this afflicted woman, he had compassion on her, and spoke to her with great kindness, saying to her "weep not." The Jews did not put the dead bodies of their friends into such coffins as we use for the purpose, with the lids fastened down ; but, after having wrapped the corpse round with linen, in which they placed sweet smelling spices, they laid it on a bier ; that is, a case like what we should call an open shell, in which they carried it to the grave. Our Lord came forward, and put forth his hand upon the bier, to shew that he wished it to be stopped : upon which the bearers stood still ; and Jesus, speaking to the corpse, said "Young man, I say unto thee, arise."

As soon as he had spoken these powerful words, the corpse came to life again, and the young man immediately sat upright, and began to give a plain proof that he was indeed alive, by talking to the people who were about him. Jesus then called the widowed mother, and gave her back the son who had been taken from her by death. All the people who saw this wonderful thing were struck with awe, and could not help giving praise to God for the great glory of this miracle. Some said that a great prophet was come amongst them, and others declared that God himself was visiting his people.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture : See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. We have already heard of many wonderful miracles by which our Lord had shewed his divine power; but this is the first time that we have been told of his using that power to call any one to life who had died. This miracle ought not only to excite in us that solemn awe regarding the power of Christ, which it did in the people who saw this wonderful work done; but it ought also to call to our minds what our Lord had said in the discourse which He had delivered a short time before, when he explained the great power for judgment which was put into his hands as the Son of Man; drawing our attention to the hour when "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth" into life again, as surely as this young man did at the word of Christ. (John v. 28, 29; forty-eighth portion, page 49.) Though this solemn rising again is the great object to which all our lives should be directed, yet it is too often forgotten in the bustle of following those less important objects, which bring their enjoyments in this world. This is very unreasonable, as well as very dangerous; and such passages of Scripture as this portion should have the effect of stirring up every one of us, to consider more seriously and more constantly, what will be the consequences to ourselves, when, after having left the body in which we live at present, we shall be called to take it again, when the voice of Christ shall say to us "arise."

QUESTIONS.

Have I a firm belief that the voice of Jesus Christ will one day call the dead to life again?

Do I act on this belief?

Do I frequently consider the consequences that will happen to me when I shall hear his voice, and shall myself arise?

2. The kind compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ appears very beautifully in his conduct to this poor woman. She had been greatly afflicted—having been left a widow with an only son, who was taken from her just at the time, when he was come to an age when he might be a comfort and support to her. At the time, however, of her greatest grief Christ appeared, and turned her sorrow into joy. So it is with those whom God sees fit to afflict, for their good in this life; and who, instead of murmuring at their troubles, consider them as coming from a father's hand, while they strive to amend whatever they find in themselves which is likely to have called for God's correction, and patiently wait for the time when He may think proper to remove it. The same Lord who sends the affliction, is He who can take it away, and give us back those things which it pains us to have lost. The joy of the mother at receiving her son from the dead, must have more than made up for the grief she had felt in losing him: and so it is with every one who trusts in God; who, like Job, have the latter end more blessed than the beginning. (Job xlvi. 12.) God has no pleasure in afflicting his people. (Lam. iii. 33; Eze. xviii. 23, 32; Heb. xii. 6, 10.) And whenever He finds it necessary to do so, in all their afflictions Christ is afflicted: He pities them, and knows how much they can bear (Isaiah lxiii. 9; Psa. ciii. 13, 14); and is ready at the right moment to shew his compassion, and, by some providential circumstances of mercy, to dry up the tears, and say "weep not."

QUESTIONS.

How have I borne the troubles with which God has been pleased to afflict me?

Have I taken the opportunity of searching into my heart to see why God has found it necessary to correct me?

Have I depended upon the compassion of Christ, and looked for his merciful help, waiting patiently, until he may choose to give it?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to have a lively sense of the certainty of the general resurrection, and a continual recollection that you yourself will have to answer the call of Christ, and arise at his voice.
2. Ask for wisdom to understand God's purpose in afflicting you, and for grace to correct what he sees amiss in you, when you are troubled.
3. Pray that you may have a firm dependance upon the mercy of Christ, to relieve your troubles in his own good time, and for patience to wait that time.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Thou eternal God, who hast committed all judgement into the hand of thy well-beloved Son. Thou Almighty Saviour, who wilt appear to call all men to thy judgment seat. Give me, I implore Thee, thy Holy Spirit to awaken me to a lively sense of these great truths, and to keep alive in me a constant recollection that I myself shall hear thy voice, and must answer it by appearing at thy call. [2] Teach me how to prepare for that great day; and especially give me wisdom to know thy purpose, whensoever thou seest fit to afflict or distress me. Give me also grace to correct and amend whatever is amis in me, and requires thy chastisement. [3] Mercifully look upon mine infirmities, and for the glory of thy name turn from me all those evils that I most righteously have deserved; and grant that in all my troubles I may put my whole trust and confidence in thy mercy. In all time of my tribulation, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgement, Good Lord deliver me.

Amen.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-SIXTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. *Amen.*

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. xi. verses 2 to 6; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vii. ver. 17 to 23.

III. THE MEANINGS :

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

MATTHEW viii. verse

2. works	<i>means here</i>	miracles
4, &c. shew		tell
6, &c. be offended in me ..		make what I do and say a stumbling block

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After our Lord had brought to life the dead son of the widow at Nain, that miracle was much spoken of, and a general report that God had visited his people (see the last portion), went about through all the country of Judæa, and the neighbouring parts.

- At the time this happened, John the Baptist was confined in prison, where he had been put by king

Herod, because John had told him that he was doing wickedly, in living with his brother's wife. (an account of this imprisonment will be given hereafter; see Mark vi. 17—28) Some of the persons who had continued to follow John's teaching, went to him in the prison, and told him about this wonderful miracle, as well as the other mighty works which were done by our Lord. Upon hearing this, he desired two of his disciples to go with a message to Jesus, and to ask him whether he was the very person spoken of in the Scriptures, as the Great One who should come (see vol. i. page 48); or whether the Messiah was still to come.

These men went, as they were desired, and delivered the message to Christ. It happened that just at the very time when they came to Him, there were a great number of sick and distressed people about him, whom he was mercifully curing of their different afflictions. Some were suffering from diseases, which he cured; some were under the power of evil spirits, which He cast out; some were blind, whom He made to see. Jesus desired the messengers from John to observe these great works that He was doing, and told them to go back to their Master, and inform him what they had seen and heard.—That people who were blind, were made to see,—those who were lame, to walk,—those who were afflicted with the leprosy, were cured,—those who were deaf were enabled to hear, the dead were brought to life,—and the glad tidings of God's mercy were taught to the poor. To this answer to John He added the remark, that those persons are indeed happy who, when they hear concerning Christ, do not find what He teaches so difficult or offensive as to make them resist it, and

turn away from the truth, because it does not come to them in a way which suits their own notions. (1 Peter ii. 7, 8 ; 1 Cor. i. 23 ; Isa. viii. 14.)

Many learned men have tried to shew why John the Baptist should send such a message to our Lord, when he must have known that Jesus was the Christ ; as he had seen what took place when he baptized Him (John i. 29—34 ; see vol. i. p. 137), and had also spoken to his own disciples so plainly about him upon a former occasion (John iii. 25, 36 ; vol. i. p. 178). It is not important for us to find out what his reasons were for sending this message ; it being enough for us to know what Jesus was pleased to answer to it. But as it might seem strange to some that there should appear to be a difference between John's former statement about our Lord, and what he now asked concerning him, it may be as well to mention, that, as John's disciples shewed some jealousy upon finding that the power and fame of Jesus were become greater than their master's (John iii. 25, 26), he most probably sent them to Christ, in order that they might be humbled and brought to a better state, by hearing from himself what the Baptist had before told them ; and which they had not kept in mind.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures. See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. *The first Application of the Twenty-second Portion will equally apply to this passage of Scripture.—See vol. i. p. 181.*
2. When these people felt doubts as to the power and truth of Christ, He (to satisfy their minds), bid

them look to the works which he performed. The account of those wonderful works is written for our learning; and in the Scripture we find how the blind received their sight at his word — the deaf, their hearing—the sick were restored to health, and even the corpses were called to life again. Those also who are poor, and no scholars, may find in the Bible the great doctrines of salvation applicable to them, and plain enough for them to understand. These proofs are as good and as sure now, as they were when our Lord spoke to the disciples of John; and they ought to have as convincing an effect, so as to take away every doubt concerning Him, and make us receive Him in our hearts as the Lamb of God, the great Saviour, who was the only appointed means by which sinners may be saved. We may also look at the wonderful spiritual works, which Christ, by the Holy Ghost, works continually before our eyes; and they ought to be sufficient to convince us of the power of the Son of God, as the only Saviour. Persons who have been blindly ignorant, become able to understand spiritual religion with great clear-sightedness, when they faithfully receive the power of Christ—persons who have long turned a deaf ear to good instruction, then become glad to hear and profit by such teaching—persons who were hindered by many infirmities from walking uprightly and firmly in the way of obedience, are then enabled to resist old temptations, under which they used to fall—persons quite given up to some particular sin, some leprosy of the heart, are then altogether changed, and are quite cured of that evil habit—persons who were altogether without a lively interest in religious things, and whose life was only a going on from day to day in sin, and who

might truly be called "dead in trespasses and sins," (Eph. ii. 1.) are brought to a new life; employing their time in the service of God, having a lively interest in religion, and constantly looking forward to the eternal life, into which, having begun it here, they hope to enter hereafter. And all this may be clearly traced to the effect of a faith in Christ Jesus, by which they have been brought under the power of his Spirit. When we see such wonderful things as these, they should make us to be more firm in receiving Christ above all others in our hearts; and to acknowledge, without any doubts, that He is indeed the great appointed Saviour.

QUESTIONS.

When I read the miracles of Christ in the Bible, does it produce the effect of strengthening my faith in Him?

Is my confidence in my Saviour increased also, when I perceive the effect of His power in changing the hearts, and altering the conduct of those with whom I am acquainted?

3. Our Lord gives a blessing to "whosoever shall not be offended" in Him — that is, whosoever does not make His doctrines a subject of offence, by which he is hindered from going on the christian way, so that he may be said to stumble over it, as a man stumbles over a stone which lies in his path. If we would partake of this blessing, we must submit to Christ's teaching, without resisting any particular points in Scripture, because we think them hard, or because they are contrary to our notions. Such a state of mind, simple, teachable, and obedient, is a blessing in itself, and has besides the promise of further blessedness. There are many things in the Gospel-doctrine of salvation by Christ, which are very likely

to offend the natural heart, and which do give great offence to some, who nevertheless think that they are christians, and hope to receive a christian's blessing. If however any person desires and expects to be blessed according to the word of God, every feeling of offence at any part of what Christ has taught, must be overcome and got rid of; for the word is — "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Christ."

QUESTIONS.

Is there any particular doctrine spoken of, in the scripture, which offends me, so that I am vexed or uncomfortable at hearing it professed?

Do I pray and strive to overcome any disinclination which I find in myself towards any part of Christ's teaching, or of the Scripture-doctrines in general?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Ask for grace to receive the testimony of Christ in the Scriptures: and pray that your faith may be strengthened by the proofs of his power shewn in the conduct of christian people within your knowledge.
2. Pray for a simple faith, so as to receive with meekness any doctrine of the Scripture, however strange it may seem to you at first sight.
3. Pray for grace to overcome any thing in you that resists some particular doctrine, and makes you offended at it.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for my learning, grant that I may faithfully receive as true all things which they contain concerning thy Son, Jesus Christ. Give me grace to perceive His power working in such of my neighbours and friends as are walking according to thy

way; and strengthen my faith by perceiving how He works in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. [2] Let my heart be teachable, and my faith be simple, so that I may receive with meekness and gentleness the word which is able to save my soul, however strange to my natural mind. And whatsoever in thy Holy Word I may profitably learn, enable me in deed to fulfil the same. [3] And whensoever through the fault and corruption of my nature, I may be inclined to rebel against any part of thy teaching, give thy Holy Spirit to overcome this evil in me: that all resistance being subdued, I may receive that blessing which Jesus has promised to whosoever shall not be offended in him. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-SEVENTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and that I may profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter xi. verses 7 to 19; and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vii. ver. 24 to 35.

III. THE MEANINGS.

or sense in which some words are used in this portion.

MATTHEW xi. verse

17, &c. piped *means here* played music

19. &c. a winebibber a man given to drinking
justified honoured—approved of
as right

LUKE vii. verse

17. rumour report—account

25. gorgeously apparelled . . dressed in fine rich
clothes

30. lawyers persons who explained
and taught the Law of Moses
rejected . . . set aside “frustrated” (*margin*)
counsel will and truth—purpose
against towards, or with regard to

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

As soon as the disciples who brought the message of John the Baptist had received our Lord's answer, they went away from Him to take it to their master. His answer might perhaps have made those

who were around him consider that the ministry of John was of small account. If this were the case, Jesus Christ presently gave them a different notion: for, as soon as the messengers had gone, he made a discourse to the people concerning the Baptist. He asked them what it was that had made people go out into the wilderness in such crowds, when John had first begun to preach. (see Matt. iii. 5, 6; Mark i. 5; vol. i. p. 104.) Was it a trifling matter which had drawn them together? Was it as though they had gone to see the reeds and rushes by the river's side shaken by the wind? Or, if not a trifling matter, did they go to see something as a show? Did they expect to find a man living in luxury, and encouraging others to do the same? one finely dressed in comfortable and rich clothing? To find such a person, they ought rather to have gone to the palaces where kings live. What was it then that had drawn such crowds together? Was it that they went to hear a person preach, who was a Prophet sent from God to teach them? This our Lord said was the true state of the case; John was indeed such a one, and a person of much more importance than the prophets of old, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others: for he was that very person who had been spoken of by the prophet Malachi (Mal. iii. 1.) as God's messenger, who was to go before the face of the Lord; and to prepare the people's minds to receive Him, when He should come to visit his temple. Christ then assured them, that up to that time there never had been a greater prophet than John the Baptist. This was because he was the person who first plainly preached to the people the doctrine of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, through faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts

xix. 4; Matt. iii. 1—12; Luke iii. 3—5.) ; and who had the high honour of beginning that ministry which was carried on by our Lord himself. But Jesus added that, when the kingdom of God should be established — that is, when, after the coming of the Holy Ghost, the plain doctrines of the Gospel should be preached to all people without distinction, even the least of the ministers of that Gospel, would have a higher privilege in preaching the salvation of Christ, than John had in his ministry.

John the Baptist had been the person to open first of all the preaching of the Gospel-kingdom. From the time he began to preach, the Gospel power (called the kingdom of heaven), might be said to be like a kingdom or country that was invaded by an army of soldiers. For the offer of forgiveness and salvation even to the outcast and worst of sinners, had made many such to snatch, as it were, at it, and rush on with eagerness to hear and lay hold of any news concerning so great a blessing. (Luke xvi. 16.) The former prophets, in every part of the Old Testament, had merely foretold of this salvation; but John had declared that it was actually come. (John i. 26-36.)

Having thus explained the high character of John's ministry, our Lord told the people that, if they would rightly understand who John was, (and were willing properly to apply the last words of the prophet Malachi,) this John was the person he had foretold, when he had said that Elias, or Elijah the prophet should be sent “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Mal. iv. 5, 6; Matt. xvii. 10—13; Luke i. 13—17; vol. i. p. 11.) To this our Lord added that earnest expression, (to call particular attention to the importance of what He was saying,) which he afterwards

made use of so frequently, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (see Matt. xiii. 13—17 ; vii. 24—27.)

He said further, that the crowd of people who went to hear John, (even the most notorious sinners amongst them, such as the Publicans,) by receiving baptism from him, shewed that they honoured God, and were convinced that the doctrine John taught was right ; but the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses, by not coming to be baptized, shewed that they would not acknowledge what he preached to be the will and truth of God, because it was against their way of thinking and acting ; and made (as regarded themselves) God's gracious designs of none effect. (Matt. xxi. 24—26.)

Our Lord then shewed how wayward and unreasonable the people were who lived at that time, and especially these Pharisees. What should He say they were like ? Why, it was with them just as if a company of boys, wanting to play in the streets, had tried to make another company of their playfellows come and join them ; and after proposing all sorts of games to induce them, but all^{to} to no purpose, they should at last say, "we have played merry tunes to you, and you would not dance—we have played solemn tunes to you, and you would not be grave." This comparison was a just reproof of their perverseness. When John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, he lived in a very strict and self-denying way—he used very simple food, eating the common insects, called locusts, and the honey made by wild bees (Mark i. 6.), and he drank neither wine nor strong drink. (Luke i. 15.) This strict way of living made people reproach him, and

some said he was mad and under the power of an evil spirit. On the other hand, when Christ came into the world, he lived in the ordinary way in which other men live, eating and drinking according to the custom of the country. (John ii. 1—10; iv. 8; Mark ii. 15, 16.) But with this he too was reproached; and for his moderate and lawful use of the things which God gives for our support, he was said to be a glutton, and given to drink, and had been nick-named the “friend of publicans and sinners.” In the one and the other case the message of God was rejected. But those who were seeking after truth welcomed it in any shape: the Wisdom of God as set forth, whether by the preaching of John, or by the ministry of Jesus Christ, was and is clearly seen and fully admitted, by all the truly wise according to the teaching of the Spirit of God.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures: See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

The questions, which our Lord put to the people concerning their attendance upon the preaching of John the Baptist, may be applied in the present day, with respect to the motives which lead many people to go to church. If they would honestly seek for the reason why they attend the service, it would often be found, that they go from habit, and because other folks do the same: but that they look upon the sermon as a very trifling matter; and that it makes as little impression upon them as if they only heard the rustling of the reeds, when the wind shakes them. Or perhaps they go to hear some preacher who is considered a fine man to talk, some one who pleases the ear, and whose manner of

teaching makes the hard things of the Gospel seem to be soft and easy. Such motives as these are but too common amongst many, who nevertheless take great credit to themselves for their regular going to church. But that, which our Lord said about the preaching of John, may be said even more strongly, with respect to the preaching of the Word of God at the present time. A minister of the Gospel is not only a prophet, but much more than the prophets of old, or even than John the Baptist himself. Christ sends him in the same way that kings send ambassadors into other countries. He stands in Christ's place to teach the people how to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. v. 20.) ; and persons who have the opportunity of hearing will have to account to God, for the manner in which they have attended to what He says, and profited by it, as far as it is according to God's word. (Ezek. xxxiii. 2—5; Luke x. 16; 1 Thess. iv. 8.) To receive this instruction without caring for it, or to listen to it from an improper motive, cannot be otherwise than offensive to God, who has appointed their ministry as surely as he sent John the Baptist to preach.

QUESTIONS.

What value do I put upon the instructions I receive from the ministry of Christ's word ?

Do I feel that it is an advantage for which I shall have to answer ? and do I endeavour to profit by it accordingly ?

What is the motive which leads me to attend my own minister ? Is it because of his talent in preaching, or because of the truths that he preaches ?

2. The ministry of John the Baptist (we see) because it declared that Christ was come, was greater than that of the prophets, even before our Lord had died on the cross. But the least of the faithful ministers of Christ in these days, is greater even than John the Baptist, because he preaches the atonement and con-

plete salvation which Christ has actually finished. The greater privileges which we possess in having such a ministry, ought to produce a greater effect; and if they do not, they cannot fail to produce a greater punishment for the neglect of them. This is a very serious consideration ; which those would do well to consider who are apt to neglect the spiritual benefits which, in this christian country, are so plentifully offered. (Heb. i. 1, 2 ; ii. 1—4.)

QUESTIONS.

What is my feeling concerning the means appointed for my instruction in the Gospel ?

Am I grateful for the advantages which I possess beyond the people who lived in the old time ?

3. By the comparison in the latter part of this portion, our Lord shews that the Jews had found some objection against each of the opposite ways, which God had taken to bring them to a saving knowledge of religion. The same thing happens now, whenever spiritual religion is faithfully taught. Fault is found with the manner of one minister ; with his strictness, or his sternness ; and when the same truths are preached by a man of a different character, then fault is found with his compliance—his being in this or that company, his mode of living, in some point or other. Careless and evil men will never want some objection to make against a faithful minister : but the real objection is in the heart, against the humbling doctrines of truth, which require repentance and dependance upon Christ for salvation. This objection may not be brought forward, but it is the secret hatred of the teaching, which sets the mind upon finding some fault with the teacher, though it be unreasonable, and contrary to other faults complained of. On the contrary, the children of wisdom — those born again of the Spirit, and whose

hearts are therefore turned to receive the truth, in the love of it—they know that there are “ diversities of gifts, but the same spirit,” and “ differences of ministries, but the same Lord” who worketh all in all. (1Cor. xii. 4-6.) They acknowledge and admire God’s wisdom shewn in making use of different kinds of instruments in his service, and in working in opposite ways for the instruction of the people; and they only desire to obtain some fresh knowledge and assistance from every ministry, be the manner of it what it may.

QUESTIONS.

Am I apt to find fault with those who are appointed to instruct me in religion? and does the objection I have to the man make me neglect his teaching?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a serious sense of the great importance of the preaching of God’s word ; and ask for grace to have right motives in attending to it, and for a blessing to profit by it.
2. Give thanks to God that your lot has been cast in the Gospel-times, rather than in the less privileged times of the prophets ; and pray to have a right value for this mercy.
3. Pray to have the love of the truth in your heart, so that you may be kept from making objections against the manner in which it is preached to you, and may only strive to benefit by the wisdom of God in sending his gospel by such different ministers.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee ; grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world, I may be found acceptable in thy sight.

Give me, I pray thee, a serious sense of the great importance of that command which Thou gavest thine apostles, to preach the Gospel to every creature. Let thy grace purify my motives and desires in hearing that gospel preached, and enable me to profit by it. [2] I praise thy great goodness towards me, in calling me into life in these times of the kingdom of Heaven, when thy truth is no longer taught in types and figures only, but plainly declared by the preaching of thy Holy Word which is able to save the soul. Let me not abuse this goodness, but give me grace to value the mercy of it as I ought. [3] Teach me to love thy truth, that I may desire it more than gold, yea than much fine gold; and find it sweeter also than honey; or the honey-comb. Let this be so deeply fixed in my heart, that I may have no inclination to find fault with those that teach it me, in whatever manner it may be conveyed. Give me by thy Spirit that wisdom which shall justify Thee, O God, for all thy dealings in saving sinners, and for the various gifts which thou hast imparted to thy ministering servants: and make me humbly to profit by thy Gospel, wherever I hear it preached. Grant these things I beseech thee, O Father Almighty, for the sake of thy Son, my Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-EIGHTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. xi. ver. 20 to 30.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xi. verse

20. upbraid <i>means here</i>	reproach, find fault
	with
mighty works	miracles
22, &c. tolerable	easy to be borne
23. exalted	lifted up
24. revealed them	made them plain
29, &c. yoke	service

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord had shewn the importance of John the Baptist's ministry, in preparation for His own, and also the waywardness of the people who lived

at that time, in neglecting both the one and the other. (See the last portion.) He then went on to apply more particularly what he had said, by reproaching the inhabitants of those places where he had performed so many miracles; because, though they had so many opportunities of seeing His power and hearing His doctrine, they would not give up their hearts to the belief of what He said, nor turn from their evil ways. He named two Jewish towns, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and said, that misery would come upon the inhabitants; for he had done wonderful miracles there, which had no proper effect upon the people. If He had gone to the cities of Tyre and Sidon (two places where there was a great deal of wickedness, but where the people being heathens, had not been taught to worship God and to read the Old Testament, as the Jews had)—and had performed some of the same miracles amongst the inhabitants of those towns, our Lord declared that they would not have been inattentive so long as the Jews had, but would have turned to God, and shewn their repentance in the manner usual in those days; such as laying aside their fine clothes, and covering themselves with coarse cloth, and putting ashes upon their heads. He added a fearful warning to those Jews, telling them that their punishment would be more severe, at the day of judgement, than the punishment of the people of Tyre and Sidon.

He then spoke of the inhabitants of Capernaum, where he had taken up his abode for so long; (Matt. iv. 13.) and said that they were proud people, and fancied themselves of great consequence; but that they should be humbled,

and punished for their pride. He had done many miracles amongst them; and he said that if such miracles had been done in the wicked city of Sodom, it would not have been necessary to have destroyed it: for many people, however far gone in sin and wickedness, would have been turned from their evil ways in consequence of seeing those mighty works: and we know that, if God had found only ten righteous in it, He would not have sent fire to consume it, and so it would still have remained. (Gen. xviii. 20—33; xix. 1—29.) Our Lord added the same terrible warning with respect to Capernaum, which He had spoken concerning the two other cities; declaring that, at the day of judgment, the punishment of the people of Sodom would be more easy to be borne than that which should come upon the inhabitants of Capernaum.

While Jesus was thus shewing the terrible consequences of the pride of these people who were rejecting him, He well knew the thoughts which passed in the minds of those who heard him. And for the purpose of answering the secret objections of persons who might think it strange, that so many of the learned priests should, in spite of his miracles, be opposed to his doctrine, He made a short prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father, which explained the reason why this happened. He thanked his Father, whom he called "Lord of heaven and earth", thus bringing to remembrance that He was Master to do as He chose: and the reason of his thankfulness was, that God had been pleased to set forth the great things concerning the salvation by Christ, in such a manner, that people who fancied themselves wise and learned, could not understand them by their own

wisdom (1 Cor. i. 19-21.); and yet that He has been pleased to make them appear plain and easy to those persons who humble themselves, and believe in simplicity what God declares; just as little children receive the instruction of their parents. (Matt. xviii. 3, 4. John iii. 3. 1 Cor. i. 26 to 29.) The reason why this was so, our Lord declares to be simply because God thought it right that so it should be.

After thus addressing the Father, Jesus spoke to the people around him, and declared that God the Father had placed all things in his hand. He said also that none could understand his wonderful nature, as the Son of God, but God the Father himself. Nor can any understand the nature of God the Father, but Jesus himself; and those persons to whom Jesus is pleased to make these mysteries appear plain. (Matt. xxviii. 18. Luke x. 21, 22. John iii. 35. Heb. ii. 8, 9.)

Our Lord having thus declared that there was no means of obtaining the true knowledge of God, except through himself, opened the way for all persons to get that right understanding, by giving a general invitation to come to Him. He said that all persons who were distressed so as to be burthened, might come to him, and he would relieve them of that which troubled them. He bid them enter into his service, and follow his teaching and his example; because he was "meek and lowly in heart;" and that, by so doing, their souls should obtain peace.

The service of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a hard service; the work and duty that he requires of his people is light and pleasant to perform. (John xiv. 27; xvi. 33. 1 John v. 3.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture : 'see No. II.

VI THE APPLICATION.

1. The way in which our Lord reproached the inhabitants of those places where He had given the greatest proofs of His power, carries with it a direct application to all who have opportunities of being instructed in the knowledge of His gospel. This may be said to be the case generally all over England; which is a country so blessed, as to religious instruction, that every Englishman may be said to have greater religious advantages than the people of almost any other nation. Some may be more favoured than others, owing to particular circumstances ; but whoever has got his Bible, and the power of reading it, has got the true account of the mighty works which Christ did in the towns here spoken of : and those persons who do not profit by what they read in their Bibles, can hardly expect to escape a woe like that which our Lord said should come upon the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.

The public worship of Almighty God—the regular instruction through the ministry — the Sacraments which Christ has appointed—and the proofs of God's working through all these means, which are often seen in the great change of conduct that takes place when sinners are brought under the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus—all these things, now in the days when the Holy Spirit has come from on high, may be said to be "mighty works" of Christ: and if any who have these advantages do not feel that true repentance which they are fitted to produce, their condemnation

and punishment may reasonably be expected to be more severe, than that of persons who, though they may have done things which seem to be more wicked, have never had the light by which they might have seen all their wickedness.

QUESTIONS.

How do I value the religious advantages which God gives me ?
Do I consider them as matters of course ? am I wearied by them ?
Do I neglect them ?

Have I good reason to hope that, upon the whole, I profit as much as I ought to do, according to the means of grace and religious teaching which lie within my power ?

2. From what Christ said in His thanksgiving to the Father it is plain that true spiritual knowledge is not to be gained by any one's own wisdom; and that the things which belong to salvation are made plain to such persons as, in simplicity of heart, really desire to be taught, whatsoever God is pleased to teach, however strange it may seem to a man's natural thoughts. This teachableness is the gift of Christ ; and real religion can only be understood and felt, so far as Christ by His Spirit is pleased to make it plain. This should make us very earnest in asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit ; and also very careful not to measure the truths in the Bible by our own notions ; but on the contrary, humbly to submit to whatever we find written in the word of God.

QUESTIONS.

With what sort of feeling do I generally take up my Bible to read ? Is it with a feeling that I am to be taught from it things which I could not of my self understand ? Do I ask Christ to give me the Holy Spirit, with an humble acknowledgement that, without that Spirit, I cannot profit by what I read ?

3. If any one were to receive a letter of invitation to visit some great person, very far above him in station, one from whom he had no right to expect such an honour, he would look carefully at the direction of the letter, to see if he really was the person invited, that he might make no mistake in going. Now this portion of Scripture contains an invitation from the Lord Jesus. He invites certain persons to come to Him, which is a great and undeserved honour; every person should be careful to see that the invitation is meant for Himself. It is addressed to "all that labour and are heavy laden:" this describes the state of distress which those persons feel who have found out that sin is a great burden, (Psalm xxxviii. 4.) and that it is a grievous thing to be so often in danger of offending God. When any one comes to this state of mind (which is the work of the Holy Spirit, John xvi. 8, 9. Acts ii. 37—39.) the invitation of Christ is surely addressed to him, and he cannot do wrong in accepting it. In going to Christ he will find that His service is the very reverse of a burden, and that by teaching him to be humble, it teaches him to be happy and at rest; and that the Master he serves lightens the work He sets him about. It is however a dangerous thing to deceive ourselves with a notion that we are accepting Christ's invitation, and thus to say "peace, peace" to ourselves, when there is no peace of that kind which Christ gives. (John xiv. 27.) Many people may think themselves true christians, while at the same time they think lightly of sin; and rather follow the world's easy notion of what is right and wrong, than fear God's heavy judgment against every thing that is evil. Persons who continue in this

state, will find out their mistake, when the Lord shall say unto them, "I know you not whence ye are, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." (Luke xiii. 24—27.)

QUESTIONS.

Does the thought that I am a sinner really distress my heart, so as to make me feel that I am one of those to whom Christ gives this invitation ?

Am I comforted by the invitation itself, so as to hope that I have accepted it ; and do I find pleasure in the service of Christ ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for grace to profit by the religious advantages which are within your reach.
2. Ask for humility and teachableness of mind, that you may receive as a little child all that God has been pleased to teach in His Holy Word.
3. Ask for the Holy Spirit of Christ, to lead you to God.
4. Pray for such a conviction of sin, as may make you feel distressed and troubled at the thoughts of your offences against God, and enable you heartily to accept the invitation to come to Christ.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Thou gracious God, who hast appointed so many means of receiving the grace which thou art willing to give, and hast afforded me so many opportunities of religious instruction ; give me also grace to profit by these advantages, remembering the solemn account which I must give of them in the day of judgement. [2] Make me to be humble-minded and like a little child under the teaching of a tender father ; that whatsoever in thy holy word I may profitably learn, I may indeed fulfil the same. [3] Give me, I implore Thee, the Spirit of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, to lead me to Thee.

[4] May that Holy Spirit so convince me of the sinfulness of my heart, that the thought of my many offences may indeed be unto me as a heavy burthen. Draw me, I beseech Thee, O God, thankfully to accept the blessed invitation of thy Son, that casting all my burthen and care upon him, and trusting entirely in his precious atonement, I may find rest to my soul, and diligently follow the blessed steps of His most holy life, till I come into thine everlasting kingdom.

AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

FIFTY-NINTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, chap. vii. verses 36 to 50.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

Luke vii. verse

37. alabaster	<i>means here</i>	a fine white kind of stone anointed	poured out upon
39. bidden	invited		
41. a creditor	a man to whom any thing is owed		
42. frankly	freely and kindly		

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

While our Lord was at the city of Nain, one of the Pharisees invited Him to come and dine with him. Jesus accepted the invitation ; and having gone to the Pharisee's house, He placed Himself at the dinner table.

In order properly to understand what happened upon this occasion it will be necessary to explain the manner in which people were accustomed at that time to take their meals. They did not sit round a table upon chairs, as we do in

these days : but the table was laid out, in shape like three sides of a square ; the fourth side was left open for the servants to bring the victuals up the middle to every part. The table was low, and all round it there was placed a couch ; that is, a sort of bed, broad enough for persons to lie at their full length across it : this couch was a little higher than the table itself. When people went to dinner, they all lay down upon this couch, with their heads toward the table, and their feet lying outwards : they usually rested upon their left elbows, while they fed themselves with their right hands. It was in this way that Jesus, and those that were with Him in the Pharisee's house, placed themselves around the table, at the meal to which they had been invited.

While the dinner was going on, a woman came into the room. It was not uncommon for poor people to come into the houses of the richer sort, and look on at their meals ; and afterwards they usually received some broken meat. It was very likely in consequence of this custom, that the woman was admitted into the Pharisee's house. She was one of those unhappy women who had given themselves up to sin, and was publicly known as a bad character. When she heard that our Lord was dining at the Pharisee's house, she took with her a valuable box made of a fine white kind of stone, called Alabaster ; and which held a sort of Balsam that was used for putting upon the hair and the face, to refresh the person, and to give a sweet smell. As soon as she came into the room, she went to that part of the couch where our Lord was lying ; as she stood behind him, her tears began to flow ;

and stooping her head a little over the couch, they fell fast upon the feet of Jesus, as he lay. As soon as she saw this, she made use of her hair (which the women in that country were accustomed to wear very long) to wipe off her tears, which had wetted the feet of our Lord. While doing this, she stooped down, and reverently kissed His feet —she then took the sweet balsam which she had brought with her, and rubbed it over them.

The Pharisee, who had invited Jesus, observed what the woman was doing ; and in his own thoughts said to himself, that if Jesus had been the person He pretended to be, one sent from God as a prophet, He would have known what sort of a character this person was who was touching Him, for she was an immoral woman. The Pharisees used to consider themselves as much defiled by being touched by any notorious sinner as if they had touched a dead body, or any unclean thing forbidden by the law of Moses (Lev. xi. 26. Num. xix. 11.) ; and it never entered into this Pharisee's mind, but that our Lord would feel the same ; so that he took it for granted, that, as our Lord allowed her to touch Him, He could not know who she was. Jesus knew the thoughts that were passing in this man's mind, without waiting for him to express them (see vol.i page 197.). He spoke to him, in answer to what he was thinking about ; and told him that He had something to say to him : upon which the Pharisee (whose name was Simon) bid Him say on. Our Lord then spoke the following parable. A certain man had two different persons owing him money—one of them owed him a large sum, which Jesus called five hundred of the common pieces of money which

passed at that time, worth about seven pence half-penny each, of our money ; the other owed him a small sum, called in the parable fifty of such pieces. Neither of these persons were able to pay what they owed ; and the man to whom they were indebted, very kindly forgave both of them, without making any conditions whatever. When our Lord had put this case, He asked the Pharisee which of these two debtors was likely to feel most love towards so kind a friend ? Simon could not do otherwise than say, that he supposed that the man who had had the most forgiven him would naturally feel the most affection. This answer our Lord said was right : then, turning to the woman, He pointed her out to Simon, for the purpose of making a comparison between them. It was the usual custom for those who kept house, when they received or entertained any friend, to meet him at the door ; and, saluting him with a kiss, to lead him into a room, where the servants took off his shoes, or sandals, and washed his feet, a necessary refreshment in that country, where also stockings were not worn. When the friend was a person of high quality, the master of the house did this himself. After the feet had been washed, some sweet-scented oil was commonly poured upon the head, which was also a comfortable refreshment. (Psa. civ. 15; xxiii. 5.) In making the comparison between the Pharisee and this woman, our Lord said that He had come, as He was invited, into Simon's house, but that *he* had provided no water for the customary respect of washing His feet : the woman, on the other hand, had paid the greatest token of respect, bathing His feet with her tears, and wiping them with the

hairs of her head. The Pharisee had not received Him with the usual civility of kissing Him when He came ; this woman, on the contrary, had repeatedly shewn her devotion, by kissing His feet, which was always considered as a token of worship. The Pharisee had not thought proper to pay Jesus the decent attention of putting oil on His head ; this woman, on the contrary, had brought an expensive balsam to express her veneration for Him by rubbing it on his feet. From all this conduct of the woman it was easy to see, that she knew her sins to be many, and also knew that Jesus was He that forgave her sins ; *therefore* her love was great, being in proportion to the great mercy that had been shewn her. Whereas persons who think that their sins are of small account, and that they have little to be forgiven, will feel in proportion very little love or gratitude.

(It should be observed that the meaning of our Saviour's words would be much more clearly understood, if instead of "*for* she loved much" they had been written "*therefore* she loved much.")

Having spoken this to the Pharisee, Jesus turned to the woman, and comforted her by assuring her of that very thing, the hope and belief of which had moved her heart to so much love for Him. He told her that her sins *were* forgiven. When the Jews who were in company with him at table heard him say this, they thought secretly in their minds, that He was blasphemously taking to himself the power which belongs only to God (see Luke v. 20—25. page 23.) Our Lord knew what they were thinking ; but this only made him speak again to the woman as plainly as before. He told her that, because she had believed, she

was saved from the condemnation of her sins. (John iii. 14—21; v. 24. see vol. i. page 173.) And he bid her go home in peace. (Rom. v. 1 Eph. ii. 8.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture. See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. In this portion of scripture we have two characters brought before us by Jesus Christ. From each of these characters we may draw a very important application. In the character of Simon the Pharisee, we may find the cause of that coldness regarding religion, and that neglect and carelessness concerning our Saviour, which is so fearfully common in these days. He loved little, because he thought he had little occasion for forgiveness. A wrong notion of what sin is, is the evil that lies at the bottom of all coldness in religion. When we only compare ourselves with those about us, and think that, upon the whole, we are not so bad as a great many of them, it is quite impossible that we should really feel that we have a great deal in us that needs to be forgiven by God. This makes us suppose, that what Christ suffered upon the cross was not of any great account to us, except in a general way; and nothing like earnest affection can ever come from such a feeling as this. Accordingly there can be no strong desire to fulfil the commands of a Saviour, who has only saved us from the payment of so small a debt as that which we fancy we have owed to God. There can be no readiness in His service—no pleasure in His worship—no delight in speaking of Him—no pain in finding Him despised. We may seem to pay a

decent respect by attending certain forms, just as the Pharisee appeared to be civil to our Lord by asking Him to dinner ; but in this outward appearance of decency, we shall be wanting in that true devotion which is the fruit of real love. It is very important therefore to remember, that a right understanding of our great sinfulness before God is the only sure groundwork of a true spiritual affection to Christ.

QUESTIONS.

What are my secret thoughts concerning my sinfulness in God's sight ? Am I satisfied with myself, because I know many persons who are greater sinners than I am ?

While I attend the worship of God, am I satisfied that I have done all that is needful, although I may have been very cold and careless, and wandering in my thoughts ?

2. The character of the woman who shewed her feeling of gratitude to our Lord is given as a contrast to that of Simon : and Jesus himself shewed the importance of following her example, assuring her that her sins were forgiven, and by bidding her depart in peace. Though she was a great sinner, she was fully convinced of the sinfulness of her heart, and of the condemnation she deserved from God. It was a sense of the greatness of her sins which made her seek Christ; (Matt. xi. 28.) and when she knew Him to be the Saviour who should save His people from their sins (Matt. i. 21.), she found in Him the forgiveness of that great debt which she felt so burthensome. This made her heart swell with love toward Him for so great a benefit (1 John iv. 19.); and this love would not be satisfied without expressing itself in every way the poor sinner could think of. It must be the same with the sinner now. They that have a right understanding of what is really offen-

sive to God, will not suppose that, because they have not lost their character before men, therefore their sin is of little amount; but, knowing that God looks to the heart, they will feel the heaviness of His displeasure for the sin and the foulness they discover in themselves: and having no excuse to offer, and nothing to make amends for their sins (as the men in the parable had nothing to pay with) they will seek the salvation of Christ, pointed out in the Gospel. Whoever comes to Him in this state of mind, will certainly be received. (John vi. 37.) Such persons will be taught that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth them from all their sin; and that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (1 John i. 7. Rom. viii. 1.) The happiness of finding this applicable to themselves, produces that affection which makes all their conduct, in some way or another, give proof of their love to Christ.

QUESTIONS.

Do I consider myself a sinner, not because my neighbours see bad conduct in me, but because my heart is not naturally disposed to love and obey God?

Do I for this reason consider myself a great sinner? And do I feel the value of what Christ has done to save me from so great a debt of sin?

Is my gratitude plainly shewn by the strength of my affection for Christ, and for everything connected with His religion?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for such a conviction of sin, as may prevent you from that self-satisfaction which makes you think lightly of your own offences before God.
2. Confess yourself to be a great sinner in God's sight.
3. Ask to have a right understanding and true feeling of the mercy of Christ in dying on the cross for your sins.
4. Pray that you may be able to shew your love and gratitude for such mercy, by every means that lies within your reach.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent ; create and make in me a new and contrite heart, that I may be truly convinced of my sins, and sincerely lament them ; and that acknowledging my wretchedness, I may never be deceived into a state of self-satisfaction, and so think more lightly of my offences. [2] I acknowledge and bewail my many sins and offences, which from time to time I have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thee O God, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against me ; I do earnestly repent and am heartily sorry for these my misdoings. [3] Have mercy upon me, most merciful Father ; to Thee it belongeth to have mercy. Teach me rightly to understand and truly to feel thy great mercy in giving thy Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ to die for me ; and thy great mercy, O Saviour, in bearing my sins upon the cross. [4] Give me the Holy Spirit, that through His grace I may love Thee, according to the measure of such love as thou hast shewn to me : and impress upon me that due sense of all Thy mercies, that my heart may be unfeignedly thankful, and that I may shew forth Thy praise, not only with my lips, but in my life, by giving myself up to thy service, and by walking before Thee in holiness and righteousness, all my days, through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTIETH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, chap. viii. verse 1 to 3, and St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iii. verse 20 and 21.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

Luke viii. verse

3. ministered unto *means here* supported.
substance property.

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After what happened at Nain, which has been told in the five last portions), our Lord set out from that place, and took a second journey all about Galilee, in the same manner as he had once before done. (See Matt. iv. 23, twenty-eighth portion, vol. i. p. 233). He travelled through all the cities and villages, and wherever he went he preached the gospel to the people, telling them the good news, that the time of the kingdom of God's grace was come. The twelve persons

whom he had chosen to be his apostles (see portion fifty-one, p. 77), were with him in this journey ; and also several women, upon whom he had shewn his merciful power, either by casting out evil spirits from them, or by curing them of some diseases which had afflicted them. One of these women was Mary, who was also called Magdalene, from Magdala, the town where she had dwelt (Matt. xv. 39) : she had been more than commonly under the power of Satan, and had been possessed by seven of the evil spirits which obey him, (Matt. xii. 44, 45 ; see vol. i. p. 124, 223) ; from which Jesus had delivered her. Another of the women who travelled upon this occasion with our Lord, was Joanna ; whose husband named Chuza was a principal officer under Herod, who governed that part of the country. [Some people have thought that Chuza was the nobleman at Capernaum, whose sick son Jesus had cured while he was in Cana. (John iv. 46—53 ; see portion twenty-four, vol. i. p. 204.) We hear of this same Mary and Joanna, among the persons who told the apostles of our Lord's resurrection, Luke xxiv. 10.] Another of the women with our Lord was named Susanna, and there were a good many more. These women paid the necessary expenses attending our Lord's journey out of their own property.

When Jesus had returned to Capernaum, the people began crowding again to hear him, in such great numbers that, as he was always ready to teach them, he and his apostles could not find time even to take their necessary meals. His relations, who were settled in Capernaum (see portion twentieth, vol. i. p. 160, 218), heard of his

constant exertions and unweared preaching : and as they considered that what he was doing was out of all reason, and that he was not in his right mind, they thought it right to try and hinder him from going on in this way ; and they went to find where he was for that purpose.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures : see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. While our Lord was making this journey for the purpose of preaching the Gospel to the ignorant people, who inhabited the towns and villages of Galilee, we find that he was attended, not only by his appointed disciples, but by a number of women who had felt the benefit of his healing power. These shewed their gratitude by diligently waiting upon him and serving him; and they whose circumstances in life were such as to enable them to spend money in His service, freely supplied Him with what was necessary. We have here an example of the effect which is always produced, when any one has really felt the benefit of what Christ has done for sinners. The power of the Holy Spirit of Christ is as great now, as it was then, to relieve the conscience, and comfort the heart, of any who have found out what a dreadful thing it is to be a sinner ; and the same effect will be assuredly produced now as then, in making those who have really received the benefit deny themselves, take all possible trouble, and freely give of their property, in order to shew their love for Christ. This cannot now be done to His own person, in the same way as these women acted ;

but our Lord says, that what is done to one of the least of His brethren will be considered as done to Himself (Matt. xxv. 40): and therefore, we may all find an opportunity of shewing our love and gratitude, in the same manner as these women did towards Christ Himself, in the person of some of His afflicted brethren upon earth.

QUESTIONS.

What trouble do I take, for the purpose of doing my best to assist Christians in distress?

Do I manage to deny myself in some thing or other, that I may have it in my power to give, if it be ever so small a sum, yet all I can, in order to supply the wants of others?

If I do this, what are my motives for so doing? Is it from kindness of heart only, or from a desire of being praised? or is it because I have sincerely felt the great mercy that Christ has shewn towards myself?

2. Jesus Christ was the Son of God; but when He became a man, He chose a condition in this life so poor, that He had not where to lay his head, and was sometimes dependant on the charitable assistance of those to whom He had done good, for His support. His object in this, as we are told by the apostle, (2 Cor. viii. 9) was that through His poverty we might become truly rich in the best things. Such an example as this ought to smooth every thing that is rough in our own lot, and teach us to remember that, however hard our case may seem to be, it cannot be harder than that in which our Saviour willingly placed Himself for our sakes. (See the second application of the sixth portion, vol. i. p. 50.)

QUESTIONS.

How do I bear the ills which belong to my condition in this life? Do I compare my poverty with the greater advantages of those above me, and so encourage discontent; or do I compare it with the greater poverty of Jesus Christ, that I may be led to be thankful?

3. Christ gave Himself up entirely to the work of the Gospel, so much so that he had not time for needful refreshment ; as he had himself said to his disciples, His meat was to do the will of God, and to finish his work. (John iv. 34; see portion twenty-three, vol. i. p. 193.) For this conduct He was called unreasonable by his friends, and considered to be “ beside himself.” Something of the same kind very often happens, when any one becomes earnestly zealous in matters of religion. There is nothing which is so likely as religion, when properly understood and felt, to fill the whole mind, and make us earnestly endeavour to be doing something for the souls of other people. We find this was the character of Christ, and something of the same kind of character must be found in all His people. Those however, who do not feel this themselves, always think such conduct unreasonable and foolish ; so that it is a common expression to say that a man is gone mad about religion, when he occupies himself very diligently in the cause of God.

QUESTIONS.

Do I diligently occupy myself, for Christ's sake, in doing good to the souls of other people ?

Do I ever think slightly and contemptuously of any, because they are called over-religious.

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a spirit of self-denial, that you may be able willingly to give both time and trouble, and money as far as is possible, to assist the need of Christians, for the sake of the love that Christ has shewn to you.

2. Ask to have a spirit of contentedness in whatever station you are placed, and pray for grace continually to remember what poverty Christ lived in upon earth for your sake.

3. Pray for the spirit of a sound mind, to know the true wisdom of being devoted to the service of God ; that you may never speak like a scoffer, nor think lightly of those who are earnest in His work.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Lord Jesus Christ, who though Thou wert rich, yet for our sakes didst become poor, that we through Thy poverty might be made rich, give me thine own Spirit, and enable me to deny myself and to offer unto Thee myself, my soul and body, to be a reasonable, holy, and living offering. Teach me willingly to devote my time and my exertions, as far as in me lies, to the benefit of thy people, and the furtherance of Thy glory ; and also bless me with a free spirit, that I may cheerfully give to others out of my substance, according as thou hast prospered me. [2] Though Thou hast been pleased to withhold from me some of those comforts and advantages in this life, which thou hast given to others, yet give me I pray Thee, a contented heart ; and draw my thoughts ever to Thee and Thy humble state upon earth, that I may remember that Thou hast borne for me far more than Thou hast put upon me to bear. [3] Bless me with the spirit of a sound mind, that I may plainly see how wise it is to be always at work in Thy service. Keep me from judging according to the judgment of scoffers, and guard my tongue from speaking lightly or disrespectfully of those who may be doing thy work more diligently than I am myself. Hear me, O Saviour, Thou eternal and merciful Son of God. AMEN.

ur Father, &c.

SIXTY-FIRST PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. xii. ver. 22 to 37, and St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iii. ver. 22 to 30.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xii. verse

25. house	<i>means here</i>	family
stand	continue
29, &c. spoil	plunder
33. make	call
37. justified	proved

MARK iii. verse

30. in danger of	liable to
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IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Amongst the crowd that came round Jesus at Capernaum, there were some who brought to Him an unhappy man of whom an evil spirit had taken possession; which had such power upon his body that he could neither see with his eyes nor speak with his tongue. Jesus cured this man by casting the evil spirit from him, and the consequence was, he was no longer either blind or dumb.

When the people saw this they were very much astonished, and began to think that the person who could do this must indeed be He that was spoken of in the Scriptures, as the Great One who should come in the family of King David, to be the Ruler over the Jews. (Ps. cxxxii. 11. Is. ix. 6, 7. Luke i. 32, 68—70, see vol. i. page 19.)

Among those who heard the people thus speak of the miracle, there were some of the Pharisees and also some of the Scribes, who had come from Jerusalem to Capernaum, most probably to enquire about Jesus. These Scribes and Pharisees answered what the people said, by giving a very different opinion ; they declared that, when Jesus cast out devils, He acted by the power of Satan the chief of the devils ; to whom they gave one of the names by which he was commonly known, Beelzebub. [This was the name of a heathen god formerly worshipped by some of the people in the land of Canaan.] They spoke in contempt of Jesus, and said that He himself was possessed by the prince of the devils. When they spoke thus, they were not within hearing of our Lord ; but He knew what was in their thoughts, and called them to come to Him. He tried to convince them by arguments and comparisons. Was it likely that Satan would overthrow his own power, by making use of one of his servants, to cast himself out of another of his servants ? If the people that inhabited the same country were divided into two parties, one against the other, the government of that country could not go on, and the people would be ruined. The same might be said of the inhabitants of a city, or even the members of a family ; if they were at variance

amongst themselves, things could not possibly be carried on, so that the city or the family could continue. And thus too it must be with Satan: if his power in one person rise up against his power in another person, and one part oppose the other, Satan would no longer be chief, his rule would be at an end.

The case of people being plainly possessed by the devils was so common, that many persons had undertaken to cast them out; these were called exorcists, and used to occupy themselves in this way as a matter of business. (See Luke ix. 49. Acts xix. 13—16, see vol. i. p. 225.) Our Lord reminded the Pharisees of this, and asked them how they made any distinction between His casting out devils (which they said was by the power of Beelzebub), and their fellow-countrymen casting out devils. The fact that the Scribes and Pharisees found no fault of this kind with the Jewish exorcists, would therefore decide against their opinion of the means by which Jesus exercised this power. And if it was not by the power of Satan that Jesus cast out devils, then it must be by the Spirit of God; in which case His overthrowing the power of Satan in this manner, shewed that the kingdom of God was certainly come amongst them. Our Lord then brought before them a parable or comparison upon this subject. Suppose a strong man had quiet possession of his house, and another man wanted to come and take his goods away from him, this other man would not be able to do so, unless he could first overcome the strong man who guarded his house; when he had conquered him and tied him, then he might go into the house and plunder it, but not till then.

Jesus then set aside the wicked opinion that the Scribes and Pharisees had expressed of Him, by declaring plainly, that whoever was not on His side, with Him, standing against Satan, was in fact His enemy, and taking to the side of Satan. This was as much as to say that there is no possibility of being carelessly indifferent to Christ, or of leaving the matter of religion as one that need not be thought of: whoever is not gathering in the fruits of the Spirit which will hereafter be enjoyed with Christ, utterly wastes his life, and must expect no harvest of blessing in eternity; but is like a man who scatters uselessly that seed which might, if properly employed, be the means of producing such a harvest.

It was upon this occasion that our Lord explained to these Pharisees and Scribes the only means by which they could hope for forgiveness, and the dreadful consequences of cutting themselves off from that means. He said that all kinds of sin were pardonable; that is, that there is no sin but what is within the reach of that merciful forgiveness, which God has been pleased to offer to mankind through the death of Jesus Christ His Son. (1 John i. 7.) He mentioned also particularly the dreadful sin of the tongue, which is called blasphemy or evil speaking (James iii. 2); even the speaking of disrespectful and offensive words against God the Father, or against Christ the Son of God and the Son of man. However wicked these words may be, they are not beyond the reach of that forgiveness which Christ died to purchase for men. But evil speaking or blasphemy against God the Holy Ghost, has the effect of preventing the only means by which forgive-

ness can ever be applied to a soul. The Holy Ghost is sent from Heaven, for the purpose of convincing people of their sins, and of shewing them what Christ has done for them. (John xvi. 7—10.) By the Holy Ghost, every one must be born again before he can partake of all the benefits and blessedness of Christ; none who are not so born again can enter into the kingdom of Heaven, or can even understand it. (John iii. 3—5. 1 Cor. ii. 13.) It is the Holy Ghost who gives spiritual life. (John vii. 63; 2 Cor. 3—6.) It is the Holy Ghost, who enables a man to walk in the way which becomes a disciple of Christ. (Rom. viii. 1—10.) All this being the case, whoever resists and blasphemes the Holy Ghost, casts away the only means by which he can possibly be brought into a state of salvation; and makes it impossible that he should be forgiven, either in the time of the Jews, or in the time of the Gospel—either in this world, or in the world to come. Such a person, continuing in his resistance of this only means of salvation, is exposed to eternal condemnation. This awful statement of our Lord's was addressed to the Pharisees and Scribes, because they had just blasphemed the Holy Spirit in Him, by saying that the miracle he had done, was worked by the power of the evil Spirit; thus wilfully resisting the truth, even against the evidence of their own senses. (See John xv. 22—24.)

Jesus then referred to that part of a former discourse, (Luke vi. 43—45, fifty-third portion, p. 103), in which he drew the comparison between a fruit tree and a man, and applied it to the subject upon which he was then speaking. He told them either to call the tree good, when its fruit is

good, or to say that it is bad, because its fruit is bad, for according to the nature of the fruit so is the tree. If the work which he had just done was a good work, it was foolish as well as wicked to say that he did it by the power of the evil spirit, and so ascribe it to a bad source. Then sharply rebuking them, (Titus i. 12—14), he called them persons whose character was like the poisonous viper, and asked them how it could be expected that with their evil hearts, they should speak any thing that was good; for just as it is with the tree, so it is with the man; according to the sap which rises in the tree is the nature of the fruit, and according to the things that the heart is full of is the talk of a man's lips. A good man who has received the Spirit of God in his heart, which makes his thoughts and desires good and profitable, talks and acts in such a good and proper manner as might be expected from such thoughts and desires. (2 Cor. v. 17.) A bad man, who rejects the Spirit of God, and whose heart therefore indulges evil thoughts and desires, (Gen. vi. 5; Jer. xvii. 9; Eph. ii. 3) talks and acts in such an evil manner as might be expected from such thoughts and desires; for that which a man's heart is full of, will certainly appear in his conversation. (Matt. xv. 18, 19; see Matt. vii. 16—20; and vol. i. p. 348.)

Jesus gave greater force than before to these words which he repeated from his former discourse, by applying them to the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, of which the Scribes and Pharisees had just been guilty; and he made the application still more awful, by taking away any excuse which might perhaps be made that their words had been

carelessly or thoughtlessly spoken. He told them that, if men speak words which are awful and wicked in themselves, (even though they may have been spoken idly, and without serious intention of the sin which the words conveyed,) for all such words they shall be called to account at the day of judgment : for the way in which people are in the habit of talking is one means by which their piety shall be proved, and if their talk has been irreligious, it shall be a witness against them to condemn them.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures : see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. It was a dreadful perverseness in the Scribes and Pharisees, to say that the good work, done to the blind and dumb possessed man, was produced by the power of the evil spirit. It would not have suited with their feelings against Christ, to have allowed that the miracle was worked by the power of God ; and therefore, they were ready to maintain any thing the most unreasonable, rather than be forced to confess themselves wrong, and acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of God. Such perverseness is a very common effect of self-willed prejudice. Men's hearts rise up against the doctrines of Christ's Gospel, which would condemn them ; they love their sins, and do not wish to be disturbed in their enjoyment of the world. They begin, therefore, by setting themselves against such doctrines ; and go on finding fault with them, until they become too prejudiced to be able to judge reasonably : in such a state of mind the plainest arguments, and the clearest proofs,

vex instead of convincing them ; and they would believe the most unlikely things, which seem to favour their way of thinking, rather than humble themselves to the truth, and give up their notions and their sins. When persons have brought themselves to such a state of mind, any proof of the power of religion over others is called hypocrisy ; and the change of conduct, which is brought about by God's Spirit is supposed to spring from some double motive. This is, in fact, doing just the same as the Scribes and Pharisees did, when they said that what our Lord had done for the good of a soul was only the effect of the devil's power. We can all see the wickedness and blasphemy of the Pharisees' conduct ; but it is not so easy to discover the true character of conduct very similar in ourselves.

QUESTIONS.

Do I cherish in my heart any prejudice in favour of something sinful ?

Am I vexed, when I find the word of God condemning something which I think agreeable and pardonable ? Or, am I anxious rather to discover the truth of the case, that I may be like-minded with God ?

Am I backward and unwilling to acknowledge the power of true religion in the changed life and conduct of any person, who may profess to be guided by the Gospel ? Do I feel disposed to place such a change to other motives, or causes ?

2. The way in which our Lord argued with these unbelievers, shews us the true source of all really good or bad actions. Satan will not lead any one to that real goodness, which would overthrow his power in the heart. There may be a great deal that is outwardly very good, or charitable, or kind : but this falls far short of the love of God and our neighbour, for Christ's sake.

Satan never can allow any person with sincerity and singleness of heart to do good in obeying God's commandments, because He commanded them. To do this would be to cast himself out of those whom he is continually striving to ensnare and secure under his evil power; it would be helping to bring his own kingdom to an end. It requires the mightier power of Christ to overcome the power of Satan in each of us; and until that stronger power has *bound the strong man*, our outward actions cannot be pleasing to God, because they do not flow from the inward source of love to Him and obedience to His commands. Where however, the Spirit of Christ takes possession of men's hearts, they are turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;" (Acts xxvi. 18.) the former thoughts and desires are spoiled, "old things are passed away, all things are become new, and all things are of God." (2 Cor. v. 17.)

QUESTIONS.

Do I search into the motives of my actions, before I am satisfied that they are good ones?

Am I watchful as to the sources of my habits, and general conduct?

Have I good reason to be convinced that I am truly born again of the Spirit, and humbly to trust that Christ has overcome the power of Satan within me?

3. That which our Lord says about the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, is indeed a fearful saying. Some people add to its fearfulness by a notion that "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost" is a sin which having been *once* committed, there can be never any hope of forgiveness. But what has been said in the explanation, will shew that it is the *continuing in* that state of mind and

heart, by which any one is led to speak against the Holy Ghost, that prevents the possibility of forgiveness. The Holy Ghost has visited, and taken possession of the hearts of many, who have in the former time of their life spoken very blasphemously against Him; and has taught them, that the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanseth us from ALL sin. (1 John i. 7.) So that we have reason to understand this passage as meaning about the same thing, as that which St Paul says, (Heb. vi. 4—6) when he declares that if persons *fall away*, that is, turn entirely from God, and quench, or put out the Holy Spirit altogether, *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.* (2 Pet. ii. 20-22. 1 Thess. v. 19.)

This should be properly understood by way of preparation for seriously examining whether we ourselves may not be committing blasphemy, that is, improper speaking against the Holy Ghost. All light and irreverent talk concerning Him, must be of this character.—All jesting about the Holy Spirit *must grieve* Him: and a habit of such light and careless talking upon the subject, *may quench* Him. It is a tremendous instance of folly to treat carelessly, or disrespectfully, the only friend by whom we can be brought to Christ. It is to be feared that many persons remain far from Christ (and therefore in a state in which if they were to die they would perish), simply because they talk lightly, that is blasphemously, against the Holy Ghost. What great mercy it is, if He has not yet given up such persons, and left them to the impossibility of forgiveness!

QUESTIONS.

What have been my notions concerning the blasphemy

against the Holy Ghost? Have I ever feared lest I might commit it? or have I thought little about it, as though I were sure never to commit it?

Have I ever given way to light or irreverent expressions against the Holy Spirit? or have I joined with others when they have done so?

4. It may astonish some persons to find that our Lord declares "that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement." There are many who suppose that light and improper words may be spoken, without really intending what they seem to mean; and that therefore they are excusable. But Christ here says, that people will be judged amongst other things according to their habits of talking: for the words would not rise to the lip, unless there were something from which they proceeded in the heart. An account must therefore be given, even of those idle words, which he who speaks them says perhaps that he does not mean.

QUESTIONS.

Am I watchful over my habits of conversation? Do I allow myself to use any expressions, the full meaning of which I could not justify, if called upon to do so?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to be kept from the prejudices which your own heart is likely to raise against the humbling doctrines of the Gospel.
2. Pray that the Spirit of God may take complete possession of you, and entirely overcome the influence of the devil.
3. Ask for grace to be continually watchful, lest by any thing you say concerning the Holy Spirit, you may grieve Him.
4. Pray to be kept by the same Spirit from any idle or improper words in your general conversation.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

- [1] Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no

secrets are hid ; keep me from the hidden evils which are apt to raise up prejudices in my heart, and to disincline me from humbly receiving thy Holy Word. [2] Send down thy Holy Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus, that he may take entire possession of my heart, and that I may devote myself in spirit, soul, and body to Thy service. Guard me against the devices of Satan, and enable me to overcome all his temptations. [3] Give me grace to be always watchful over my tongue, so that I may never speak a single word to grieve that Gracious Comforter by whom alone I can be sealed unto the day of redemption. [4] Keep me from all idle talking, and from every careless expression that may lead to sin ; that so the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, may always be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-SECOND PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xii. ver. 38 to 45.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion

MATTHEW xii. verse

38. &c. a sign	<i>means here</i>	a proof
41. in the heart of the earth	buried
42. from the uttermost { parts of the earth	a long way off
44. garnished	furnished

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

While our Lord was engaged in the discourse, of which an account is given in the last portion, some of the Scribes and Pharisees appear to have grown impatient at the plain manner in which he was reproofing them; and they interrupted him with the same question that others had asked Him when He first began His ministry in the temple. (see John ii. 18. Portion 20, vol. i, page 163.) They said that they wished to see Him do something, which should be a proof of his authority for preaching such doctrine. (They had already seen Him work the miracle of casting out the Devil from the blind and dumb man; but

they refused to believe that this was by the power of God, and had pretended that it was done under the influence of Satan himself. (see page 160.) Jesus refused to give them the sign or proof which they wanted, declaring them to be a wicked set of people: and because they had turned away from God, to whom they rightfully belonged as a wife does to her husband, and had followed their own desires, just as their forefathers had done when they worshipped idols, He called them an adulterous set of people; which was the dreadful name which their idolatrous forefathers had brought upon themselves. (Isaiah lvii. 3—5. Jer. iii. 8, 9. Ezek. xvi. 17—21; xxiii. 37, 38.)

He declared that the only proof that the Jews should have, would be one like that which was given by the prophet Jonah. Jonah had been commanded by God to go to the people of the great city of Nineveh, and tell them that God was about to punish their wickedness: he was however afraid to do as he was told, and instead of going at once on his road, he went into a ship and sailed away from Nineveh. God raised a great storm on the sea where this ship was; and when the sailors found that it was upon his account that they were put in such trouble, he told them to throw him into the sea, which at last they agreed to do. As soon as he was thrown into the water, God had prepared a very large fish of a kind which has a great bag for air under its stomach, big enough to hold a man; into this Jonah was received, and was kept alive there by God for three days and three nights, at the end of which time the fish put him forth safely upon the dry land. (see Jonah i. ii.) In like manner Jesus said that

He himself, the Son of Man, after being killed would be buried, and remain in the grave the same time that Jonah had done, and yet come forth again alive. (Luke xi. 29, 30.)

This mention of Jonah, led Jesus to warn the people to whom he was speaking, that in the day of judgment the inhabitants of Nineveh would appear before God with them, and would be witnesses whose conduct would give testimony against the Jews, and make it clear that they deserved to be condemned : because the Ninevites repented and turned from their evil ways when they had heard what Jonah preached to them (Jonah iii.) ; but, though Jesus was greater than Jonah, the Jews had heard Him and had not repented. Our Lord referred also to the account of the Queen of Sheba. He said that on the day of judgment she too would appear together with the people to whom He was then speaking, and that her conduct would serve as a proof how completely they deserved to be condemned ; for that the Queen of Sheba, who lived a very long way southward of Jerusalem, had come all that great distance on purpose to satisfy herself concerning the great wisdom of King Solomon, of which she had heard. (1 Kings x. 1—13. 2 Chron. ix. 1—12.) Jesus who was talking to them was greater in wisdom than Solomon ; but they had no desire to be satisfied concerning what He said ; on the contrary, they only talked to Him that they might endeavour to find fault. (Matt. xii. 10. Luke vi. 7 : xi. 54. John viii. 6.)

When our Lord had thus put aside the question with which they had interrupted His discourse, He concluded the subject upon which he had been

speaking ; and shewed how different was the state of a person out of whom the evil spirit went for a season of his own accord, compared with that state which he had just described, when the strong man who possessed the house was first overcome and bound. (Matt. xii. 29.) He said that when an evil spirit is only gone out of a person without being forced to go by a power greater than his own, he is as uneasy and wretched as a man would be in a hot parched sandy desert ; the evil one tries in vain to find any ease or rest, and in this condition he determines to go back again into the person whom he had for a time left, and whom he calls his own house ; he finds such a person's heart unoccupied by better affections, and quite ready to receive him ; just as a house would be prepared for the return of the master, with no other tenant living in it, but cleaned and properly furnished. The wicked one, however, does not return alone ; but taking seven other of his fellow-spirits more wicked than himself, they take possession of the house and live in it : that is, they enter into the heart of such a person and rule there, plunging him into all wickedness ; so that the condition of a man, after being thus left for a season by the evil spirit without having given himself up to the power of Christ, is much more dreadful than his former one. In making this fearful statement, our Lord applied it directly to the set of people to whom He was speaking, and said that such would be the case with that wicked generation.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The Bible contains full and sufficient proof of the truth of the Gospel, and clearly shews what will be required of us in sincerely receiving that Gospel. Whoever having the Bible still makes any doubt concerning these great and important things, does in fact just the same as those persons did, who asked Jesus Christ for still further proofs (or signs) to shew the truth of what he said, though they had just seen him perform a miracle. Such persons are not likely to have their doubts satisfied, or their minds brought to see the truth : because they not only resist the force of all those signs which the Pharisees had, but by giving way to their doubts in this day, they refuse to believe the last and greatest sign which our Lord has been pleased to give of the truth of his Gospel, that is, his Resurrection. He died and was buried, and on the third day he came forth again alive out of the grave, never to die any more. This wonderful thing he did in order to prove plainly that he himself had overcome death, and to confirm the promise that all who believe in him should do the same. (John xi. 25, 26. Job. xix. 25—27. Isaiah xxvi. 19.) And accordingly we find, that his resurrection from the dead is the great sign or proof which the Apostles brought before the people, in all the sermons which they preached, to convince them of the truth of the Gospel. (Acts i. 22; ii. 24, 31, 32; iii. 15; iv. 10, 33; x. 40, 41; xiii. 30—38; xvii. 3, 31, 32; xxiii. 6; xxvi. 8, 23.) What foolishness it must be for any one in this day, to wait for something more, after so much has been

done to shew the truth of the Gospel. In the Scriptures an account of all these things is written by the Spirit of God, on purpose for us (2 Tim. iii. 14—17. Rom. xv. 4); and if these fail to convince us, we have no right to expect any further help, but rather to be left to all the consequences of our own unbelief.

QUESTIONS.

Am I satisfied, that the Scriptures contain quite enough to prove the truth of Jesus Christ, and his Gospel?

i. Do I act as if my mind and heart were really convinced of this?

2. The doctrine which our Lord teaches in this portion respecting one particular of the general judgement, applies very strongly to all persons who have opportunities of religious instruction. They will not only be answerable hereafter for properly improving them, but every one who has taken advantage of any less powerful means of grace, will hereafter appear as a witness that their instruction was enough to have produced the effect intended; and therefore, those who have failed to profit, will be without excuse. If the men of Nineveh profited by Jonah's preaching, so as to repent and turn away from their sins, how inexcusable must those have been who heard the preaching of Jesus Christ, without doing the same. And if any ignorant person, with little or no means of instruction, has by means of some word in season, or the simple reading of a chapter in the Bible, so effectually received the Gospel, as to bring forth the fruit of a true faith (which through God's mercy has been the case in thousands of instances); every such person will rise up on

the day of judgement, as a witness to prove with how few opportunities that same work of salvation could be accomplished in one soul, which has not been produced by far greater opportunities in another. Thus every poor and ignorant sinner, who is saved in spite of many disadvantages in this life, will be a witness against those who in spite of greater spiritual advantages remain uninfluenced by true religion, and will condemn them as inexcusable. It becomes therefore a matter of very great importance, that we should every one of us examine ourselves, to see how far we profit by the religious advantages which are within our reach. (See page 139.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I in the habit of considering the account I shall have to give for the means of religious instruction which I possess?

Do I feel convinced that, if others profit effectually by the same instruction which is thrown away upon me, it will serve to make my own condemnation more plain and more sure?

3. It is a fearful thing which we discover from what our Lord has said, that the evil spirit may *go out* of a man of its own accord without being driven away, so that it can return and again take possession of his heart as its own property. From this we may learn that persons may give up their sinful courses for a time, without its being sure that they do so by the power of Christ, and are therefore truly Christians. Many people make up their minds to give up some sin in which they have been in the habit of indulging, because circumstances have made them ashamed of it, or because their temptations are not so strong as they were; and they often comfort themselves under such a change, as if it were all

that is necessary, and as if they were therefore sure of going the right way : they do not look into their hearts to see whether they do truly hate the sin, while perhaps they are only ashamed of its being known ; they have not any new feelings of affection for Christ, in the place of those desires which have ceased to influence them. In such a case, persons who take credit to themselves for giving up a sin to which they are no longer strongly tempted, are only keeping their hearts vacant to receive their old sinful affections with greater pleasure ; which is what is meant by the house being "empty, swept, and garnished." Such a quiet state of apparent improvement may last a long time, possibly for years ; but some time or other fresh temptations to old sins, or to worse, will come on stronger than before, and will produce a more wretched state even than there was at first. Nothing can keep us safe from sin but the power of Christ being established in us ; until He drives out the evil one, old things are not passed away, whatever decent change may seem to have taken place in our outward behaviour.

QUESTIONS.

Do I hope and believe that I am less apt to commit sin, than I was at a former time ?

How does this happen ? is it only because I am less tempted, or that my conduct is more likely to be exposed ? or is it because I love Christ more, and understand more of the sinfulness of sin which brought Him to the cross ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for an humble mind, so as to be satisfied with what the Scriptures tell you, concerning the Salvation of Jesus Christ, without wanting more proof of the truth of heavenly things, before you will believe them.

2. Pray to be deeply impressed with the account which must be rendered for the religious instructions you receive ; and pray

that you may so profit by your opportunities, that no person who may profit more effectually, may rise up in judgement against you.

3. Pray that your conduct may give continual proof, that your improvement is because the Spirit of Christ has taken possession of your heart, and not merely because the evil spirit has left you alone to give up some bad habits.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Lord of all power and might, who hast been pleased to give so many proofs of the truth of the Gospel of thy Son, and who hast especially declared it by His resurrection from the dead, give me I pray thee an humble mind ; that, without seeking to follow my own wisdom, I may be satisfied with what Thy wisdom has written for my learning, concerning the salvation of Christ. And as he has declared those heavenly things which no man could know but Himself, give me faith to believe them without waiting for further signs of their truth. [2] Keep me ever under a deep impression of that solemn account which I must one day give, for all the opportunities of knowing Thee which have been brought within my reach ; and enable me so to profit by them all, that no one who has had fewer advantages may rise up in the judgment to condemn me. [3] Make me so to live according to the example of Jesus, that my conduct may be as a bright light, plainly shining by His Spirit within me ; and let every evil thing in me be so corrected as to prove plainly that the power of the evil one has not withdrawn from me to return again ; but that he has been driven away by the greater power of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-THIRD PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xii. v. 46 to 50.
St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iii. verse 31 to 35.

III. THE MEANINGS;

[There is no word used in this portion, the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

It was stated in the sixtieth portion (see Mark iii. 21, page 154), that the relations of Jesus thought that he was not in his right mind, when they heard how he was giving himself up entirely to the work of teaching the people; and we were there told that they set out from their home for the purpose of finding him, and putting him under some restraint. It was his mother and her other sons (see vol. I. page 160) who had this intention; and they came to the house where Jesus was, just at the time he was finishing that discourse to the people, which was explained in the last portion. There was such a crowd round the door that they could not make their way into the house; and therefore, as they were standing outside, they called to some one who was within, and begged

him to forward a message to Jesus, telling him that his mother and his brothers wanted to speak with him. The people inside the house were sitting all round Jesus in as great a crowd as those who were standing without; therefore, they passed the word to him, to let him know that his mother and his brothers were waiting outside to speak to him. Our Lord took this opportunity of explaining the greatness of his affection for those who receive the Gospel which he preached, and the nearness of the spiritual relationship by which they are joined to Him. He looked upon the people who were sitting round him, and raising up his hand over those who were nearest he said, that he considered these people in the light of mother and brothers. God in heaven is the Father of Jesus Christ ; and all persons who heartily obey what God commands, shew that they have the spirit of that heavenly Father ; and Christ looks upon all such persons as being joined to Him by the closest relationship, even like a brother, or a sister, or a mother. (1 John iii. 24; ii. 3—6; iv. 13. John xiv. 23; xv. 10—15; xvii. 19—23.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. No human affection can exceed the love which our Lord Jesus Christ has shewn for us ; and besides giving the strongest proof of it in laying down his life for us, (John xv. 13. Rom. v. 7, 8. Eph. v. 2), he has taken every opportunity of expressing this love in words and comparisons, which convey to the mind feelings of the greatest

tenderness. (Matt. xxviii. 10. John xx. 17.) While we read such affectionate expressions as those made use of by our Lord in this portion, our hearts ought to swell with gratitude, and with a return of true affection, towards Him who calls himself our brother, that we may feel towards him with the affection of a brother. (Matt. xxviii. 10. John xx. 17) It must indeed be a hard heart, which can know of such great and tender kindness shewn by Jesus Christ the Son of God, without being softened into some feeling of the same kind. So reasonable is it to expect this, that when a person is without such feeling, we may well suppose that he cannot possibly believe what has been told concerning the love of Christ towards him : this secret unbelief is the real reason why many people, who profess to be Christians, treat the salvation of Christ with such coldness of feeling as if it were a common-place matter. Every one who knows any thing of what Christ has done for mankind, and who nevertheless feels nothing like a lively affection towards such a brother, must stand convicted, either of want of faith in not believing what he is told, or of greater hardness of heart than is generally shewn even by the most unfeeling persons in the case of those who love them.

QUESTIONS.

Are my feelings towards Jesus Christ such as may reasonably induce me to hope, that I return with gratitude the love which he expresses towards mankind ?

Do I believe that he really does feel as a brother towards me ? and if so, am I satisfied with the degree of love I feel in return ?

2. In making the first application, it has been taken for granted, that those who desire to apply

this portion are sincerely endeavouring to live in obedience to God's commandments. It is absolutely necessary to have this mark of the Spirit, before we can suppose that we are born again of the Holy Spirit, and that therefore, being children of God, we shall be looked upon as brothers or sisters by His Son Jesus Christ. It is only such as continue in the good works which God has prepared for those who are made anew in Christ to walk in, (Eph. ii. 10), who can have any proof that they are really become members of the family whom Christ will own. It is as many as are led by the Spirit of God that are the sons of God, and so are joint-heirs with Christ. (Rom. viii. 14-17.) He calls himself the eldest brother only of those who are made like him in character. (Rom. viii. 29.) It is because persons are made holy by the same Holy Spirit which dwells in Christ, that He is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Heb. ii. 11.) No wonder then, that people who take no pains to obey God, and to follow where His spirit leads them, who have no pleasure in being of the same character that Christ was, and who do not seek the same spirit of holiness ; —it is no wonder that such as these should feel no lively affection to Christ, and should not be touched and softened by what He has done for them. However willing Christ may be to treat them as brothers, they are disposed to treat Him as an enemy, who only hinders them from that which they truly love, the indulgence of their sins.

QUESTIONS.

Am I in earnest in striving to obey God in all things ?
Do I seek to prove to myself that I am a child of God by this fruit, rather than by any other sign ?

If I have reason to fear that my love to Christ is cold and lukewarm, have I not also reason to look for the cause of such coldness in a love of some sin, or some neglect of God's law?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Ask for a deep sense of gratitude for Christ's love towards mankind, and for faith to believe that this love applies to yourself; so that you may feel towards Him as to a brother, and return his great love to you, by affection as great as you are capable of.
2. Pray to have a desire to do the will of God completely, in the manner and the spirit of a child who obeys his father; so that you may have good grounds for applying to yourself the affectionate language of our Lord Jesus Christ.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O gracious and all-merciful God, who hast freely given thine own Son to die for us, open my mind to perceive the love which that blessed Saviour has shewn towards all mankind, and fill my heart with a deep sense of gratitude for such love: give me grace to know and feel that I myself am the object of Christ's love, that I may also be stirred up to feel a suitable love towards him in return. Teach me to believe that he considers me in the light of a brother, that I may love him as a brother indeed. Make me to see how great has been his love to me, that I may love him with all my heart, and all my mind, and all my soul, and all my strength, [2] Put into my heart, O God, an earnest desire to do thy will, with the cheerful obedience and humble submission of a child to his father; and let this desire be so plain in my conduct, that I may not be afraid to apply to myself the words of tender love which were spoken concerning those who do thy will, by thy Son, my Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-FOURTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 1 to 3.

St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iv. verse 1 and 2.

St. Luke's Gospel, chap. viii. verse 4.

III. THE MEANINGS;

[There is no word used in this portion the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

On the same day, after our Lord had delivered his discourse, and had spoken to the people concerning his relations, he left the house and walked to the sea-side. Great numbers of people followed him; and, without heeding the weariness which his body must have felt, after having been so long preaching already, (John iv. 6—34, see vol. I. page 193) he began to teach them again; and for that purpose sat down upon the shore. The crowd however continually increased, as people were coming from all the towns round about: and finding it therefore very inconvenient (or perhaps impossible) to address such a vast

multitude of persons, while he was sitting on the shore, he did as he had done upon a former occasion (see page 2); He got into a boat, probably that which he had told his disciples to hire for him (see Mark iii. 9, page 72), and sat down in it. This boat was on the water, a little way off from the land; and the people stood upon the shore to listen to what he said. In this situation he gave them instruction concerning a great many things, by means of parables. The word *parable* means a comparison, in which sense it has been already used. (see pages 31 and 101.) But though this is the simple meaning of the word taken by itself, the same word is also used to express more particularly a short story or tale, which is told for the purpose of making a comparison in such a manner, that the object to be explained becomes clearer by seeing its likeness to that which is told in the story. Such were the parables which our Lord made use of after this time, for the purpose of instructing the people. Upon the present occasion He began with the parable of the Sower, which will be explained in the next portion.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

Jesus Christ, while upon earth, was subject to the natural wants and fatigues of the body like any other man; (Matt. iv. 2. Mark iv. 38. John iv. 6; xix. 28.) yet we find him always at work for the good of mankind, and however wearied with one labour, always ready for another if

an opportunity occurred. This part of the character of Christ ought to put those Christians to shame, who are too apt to consider their own ease as a matter of more importance than the spiritual advantage of others. If any persons, whatever may be their condition of life, are heartily desirous of helping on the salvation of those amongst whom they happen to live, opportunities will often happen, in which something may be done to advance that great object : but in most cases some trouble must be taken for this purpose, and generally speaking such opportunities, to be of any use, must be attended to at the moment, whether it be convenient at the time to take the trouble or not. Any one who is on the watch for such occasions, will find that they very often occur ; but our natural sloth would often lead us to think, that there is no need for us to meddle in the matter, or that our present circumstances are an excuse for our leaving it alone. This secret working of a slothful selfishness is put to shame by the example of Jesus Christ ; who forgot his weariness at Jacob's well, that he might bring the Samaritan sinners to the waters of life, feeling it to be his meat and drink to do the will of his Father, who had sent him to save sinners ; and who, after preaching all the morning to one set of people, gave himself afresh to the work in the afternoon, when the increasing crowds gave him another opportunity of shewing them the way of salvation. His example ought to make every one of us apply that Scriptural advice " whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." (Eccles. ix. 10.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I ready and diligent in making the most of any occasion for doing good to my neighbours which may happen to come in my way? particularly any spiritual good, either by speaking a word in season, or by taking trouble to shew them what is right?

Do I satisfy myself in passing over such opportunities, by saying that such a thing is no business of mine, or by thinking that the likelihood of good is not worth the trouble?

VII. HEAD FOR PRAYER.

Pray for a spirit of self-denial; that you, like Christ, may be always ready and diligent in doing good to others, whatever trouble it may cost you.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

O Thou Gracious God, who art Thyself the very Spirit of Love, let the sense of Christ's love to me teach me so to love those for whom (together with myself) he laid down his life, that I may be at all times ready to give up (if necessary) my own ease and comfort in order to advance the good of my fellow-sinners. Make me willing to take trouble at any time, if by so doing I may help them forward in the right way; and enable me thus to follow the blessed example of that Jesus my Lord and Saviour, through whose mediation I offer up these prayers. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-FIFTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. ver. 3 to 9, and 18 to 23. and St. Mark's Gospel, c. iv. ver. 3 to 9, and 14 to 20. and St. Luke's Gospel c. viii. versc 5 to 8, and 11 to 15.

III. THE MEANINGS;
or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xiii. verse

4 &c. fowls	<i>means here</i>	all kinds of birds
devoured		eat up quickly and greedily

19 &c. understandeth }	..	does not take it in
it not } ..		and receive it

20. anon	immediately
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21. dureth	continues
tribulation	great trouble

MARK iv. verse

19. lusts	strong desires
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LUKE viii. verse

13. temptation	trial
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IV. THE EXPLANATION.

The instructive story with which our Lord began his teaching upon this occasion, in what is called his Sermon in Parables, was that of the Sower and the seed.

There was a farmer who went out to sow his land with proper seed to produce a crop. It happened that there was a foot-way which lay along one of his fields; and as he was casting his seed-corn, some of it fell upon this public way. The next passengers that went along the path trod upon these grains; and the birds, which are always following the footsteps of a sower, presently picked them up, flew away with them, and eat them.

In one part of the farm there was very little earth, which lay but thinly over a hard rock. Some of the seed-corn was cast here. This was no sooner in the ground than it began to spring up, because it was in a light soil with no depth. Presently however, when the sun began to get its power, the heat was too great for this plant, because there was no root to draw the moisture and nourishment from the soil. The consequence was, that the early blade was burnt up, and the grain withered away in the ground.

In another part of the farm there was a spot where some thorns had taken root, so that though they had been cut down, they had got hold of the ground. Some of the seed corn fell here. In due time it came up, but the thorns sprang up also, and were stronger than the blades of corn. Their branches soon grew out, and twisted themselves together, (Nahum i. 10.) so as to hinder the corn from rising up under them; and at last the thorns quite choked it. When harvest time came there was nothing to gather from this seed.

Besides all this, the corn was sown upon that part of the land which had been properly ploughed

and prepared, and was in good order. This seed turned out well, and in due season it produced a good harvest. There was a considerable difference however, in the yield of the different grains of seed. Some produced a return of thirty grains for one that had been sown—some yielded sixty grains for one that had been sown—and some yielded as much as a hundred grains for one that had been sown.

After telling the people this parable for their instruction, our Lord repeated that earnest call to attention which he had made use of upon a former occasion—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matt. xi. 15.)

It was not until after our Lord had finished all the sermon of parables, that he was pleased to explain to his disciples the meaning of this story of the sower and the seed. In the explanations which have been hitherto given, we have followed the regular course of events just as they happened. But if we were to do the same with respect to the time when Jesus explained this parable, we should separate his explanation from the parable itself, and make it less easy to be understood. Upon this occasion therefore we will go forward a little, and take in now the account of this parable which our Lord afterwards gave privately to his disciples, as will be shewn in a future portion.

Jesus told them that in this parable, by the seed-corn is meant the word of God, as it was to be preached under the Gospel. The sower represents the Apostles and other ministers who were afterwards to be sent all over the world, to preach the Gospel to every creature. (Mark xvi.

15 Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) The different consequences which followed the casting of the seed into the four different soils, describes the different effects caused by the preaching of the same Gospel to different people, according as each one receives it.

The seed that fell upon the foot-way pictures the case of persons, who hear the preaching of God's word, but do not *take it in*; that is, not only they do not see the meaning and intention of it, but they do not let it come into their minds and hearts, they do not care about it, or take any notice of it. We may learn from the parable what is the reason why they do not take it in;—it is because their hearts have become too hard to feel any thing about it, and their minds too much occupied by the passing to and fro of worldly thoughts, to give any attention to heavenly things: just as the ground of a public path becomes hardened by the constant treading of passengers. Now suppose any information concerning Christ and His doctrine is given to persons in this state (by their accidentally hearing some sermon, or some words which might produce good thoughts in them and lead to better things, if they would only attend to and ponder what they hear); what happens? the devil, Satan, the wicked one, (all three names are given to him in this scripture) will not allow the word, which is able to save the soul (James i. 21), to lie long in the memory of such a person; for fear it should make an impression, so that it should be believed, and the soul be saved. But, if the next worldly business, or sinful desire which passed over the person's mind, has not already crushed the word and dri-

ven it away, that Evil one, who is ever walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, (1Pet. v. 8.) takes it out of the thought by some wicked suggestion about it : by some false or foolish reason why it should not be attended to—some joke to excite laughter at what has been heard—some worldly argument to turn away its application : and so the precious word of God is despised and forgotten.

What happened to the seed-corn which was cast into the thin soil with the stony ground under it, is meant to represent the case of those persons who, when they hear the preaching of the word of God, are pleased with it, and are in some measure really interested in the subject ; but the doctrines of the Gospel do not take hold of their heart and affections. There is no real love for Christ, no real dependance upon the Holy Spirit, no strong principle within them which can supply their religion with strength and power, in the same manner as the long roots of wheat draw nourishment from a deep soil, to supply the stem and the ear in their growth. As in the thin soil the corn would spring up and seem to flourish at first, so the religion of such people seems very good and effectual at the beginning, and for a little while. Very soon however circumstances happen which try the sincerity of every one who professes seriously to attend to spiritual things. Trials come for religion's sake ; some men suffer in their worldly concerns, when they are considered *too religious*. Worldly friends fall off, even relations oppose and distress them ; some are laughed at, some even insulted, because of their *religion*. In the times when the Gospel was first

preached, after it had begun to produce some effect in the world, the heathen kings, who had all the power in their hands, used to treat Christians in a very terrible manner. They used to put them to death in the most cruel way ; putting out their eyes and cutting off their limbs—burning them alive—and setting wild beasts upon them to eat them up. For nearly three hundred years, persons who professed to be christians, were in danger of suffering such persecution, tribulation, and affliction as this, from heathen kings : and even since those times, the ministers under the orders of the church of Rome, (who improperly call themselves “catholics”) have frequently used the same kind of dreadful persecution against many christians, only because they made a spiritual profession of the true faith of Christ. All these trials were included in the tribulation spoken of by our Lord, in explaining this parable. But he also referred to that lesser degree of trouble which, even in our more favoured days, very commonly comes upon those who declare themselves in favour of spiritual religion. This trouble is not what those people expect who are described by the comparison of the seed sown in the stony ground. It is too much for them ; just as the heat of the sun is too hot for the young blade of corn, which has no room for its roots to grow, and is therefore dried up. Their faith is not firm—their religious feelings are not well founded ; and being shallow, they cannot stand the trouble or inconvenience which religion brings upon them : and so they soon alter their minds upon the subject ; and taking offence at this effect of the doctrines of the Gospel, they give up their religious profes-

sion, and fall back into the old ways of the world. (Matt. x. 16—22, 32—39. Luke xvii. 25, 32, 33. John xvi. 33. Acts iv. 21 ; v. 17—28, 40 ; vii. 57—60 ; ix. 1, 2. 1Cor iv. 9. Heb. xi. 36—38. 1Pet. iv. 12—19. Rev. ii. 10 ; iii. 10. ; xvii. 6, 9, 18, xviii. 24.)

That which happened to the seed-corn which was cast among thorns, is meant to shew the case of persons under very different circumstances from the last. The hindrance before was occasioned by the circumstances about them, the hindrance in this case arises from the evil within their own hearts. The comparison points out those who hear the preaching of the Gospel, and pay attention to it, and receive it, at least so far as that many effects of real religion are produced in them. They not only acknowledge that the Bible is true, but they know that its truths must be acted upon ; and yet the difficulties of their worldly concerns draw off their minds and attention from the things of religion. They are convinced of the reality of the Gospel-doctrine, but they do not let it take its proper place above all other things in their hearts : so that their worldly concerns occupy and fill up their minds faster than their spiritual concerns do. The desire of getting gain, of having something more than we already possess, something which (whether it be much or little) is in fact looked upon as riches by the person who desires it,—this love grows faster in the heart than religion ; and is more deceiving perhaps than any other desire that a man can have : for it makes him give up a real good for that which, if he were to get it, would be no good to him ; and it makes him fancy himself occupied

wisely and well, when in reality nothing can be worse or more foolish than working hard for gain in this world, and taking no pains to be well off in the world to come. (Matt. xvi. 26; xix 21, 22. Luke xiii. 13—31. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. Prov. xx. 21; xviii. 20.)

Besides these hindrances to the growth of religion in the heart, there is another very common one which (wherever it is encouraged) flourishes much faster than the word of God; namely, the love of the pleasures of this life. These often take such hold of the mind, that persons who are really awakened to a sense of the importance of true religion, will lay aside the practice of it, in order to give themselves the enjoyment of some idle or sinful amusement, which lasts but for a moment, and most commonly disappoints them even while it lasts. Very small matters are considered by the lovers of pleasure to be more important than the most solemn teaching of God's word; even when their consciences are stirred up enough to make them know something of the value of that word. (1 John ii. 15—17. 2 Tim. iii. 4, 5. Gal. v. 21.)

Our Lord tells us of another hindrance which he compares to the thorns, "the lusts of other things;" that is, the strong desire and affection which people have for any thing, if it stand in their hearts before Christ and his salvation. Affections, which would be very right and proper if they were in their right and proper places, rise up to hinder the effect of true religion, unless the Spirit of God takes the first place in our hearts, and rules it, and keeps it in order. Thus love for a husband or a wife, for a child or for a father,

may become like the worshipping of an idol; and may be found to be one of those "lusts of other things," which hinder and destroy the effect of God's word in saving the soul. (Matt. x. 37—39. Luke xiv. 26, 27. Phil. iii. 8.)

All these things are compared by our Lord to thorns, which grow up faster and stronger than the good seed sown amongst them. As thorns spread out their branches, which twist one into another, so that the rising blade or stem cannot get the air or sun, and at last become choked; even so the troubles of life, or the deceitful desire of gain, or the indulgence in pleasures, or the strong love of any thing rather than God, such things as these gain much more strength day by day, in the heart where they have taken root: and they will so surround us, and entangle one thing with another, that there will be no room, and no time for religion, though the truth of God's word may be struggling within us. The voice of conscience will be stifled, the word of the Gospel choked; and the soul will bear no fruit to be gathered by the Lord on the great day of his harvest. (James i. 22—25.)

There was yet (according to the parable), another manner in which the seed was sown.—The seed cast into the good ground is meant to teach us the way in which the Gospel becomes effectual with those who in the end will be found to be real disciples of Christ. The heart of such persons is brought into proper order by the working of God with them, even before they know the doctrine of his word, just as the ground is ploughed and prepared for the sowing time by the farmer. They hear the preaching of the truth

as it is in Jesus ; and we are told in three accounts of our Lord's explanation of the parable, that they "understand it"—they "receive it"—and they "keep it." The understanding of it means here the same as before—the taking of it in—the admitting it readily, not resisting it, not giving it only a divided attention, but embracing it altogether. In the hearts of these the truth of God takes deep root, and springs up strongly, in spite of every hindrance. The profession of religion is not too quickly made, nor soon chilled and overcome ; but the fruit is produced "with patience," both in its growing and in its abiding. The fruits which Christ looks for from his Gospel are good works wrought by the Spirit within us, making our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father in heaven. It is not every body who is able to shew the fruit in the same quantity, any more than the same number of grains are found in all ears of corn growing on different stems in the same field ; some will have more grains, and some less, though each will increase the harvest. Thus some true christians are found more diligent and more useful than others : but every true christian will shew the benefit he has received from the word of God, by living according to it ; the fruit of some being as thirtyfold, some as sixtyfold, and some as an hundredfold. (Isaiah lv. 10, 11. John vi. 37 ; xv. 1—8 Matt. xxv. 14—30. Luke xix. 15—19, 26.)

V. THE REPETITION.

"read again the Scriptures, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. This first parable of our Lord conveys the fullest application of any that he ever spoke. It includes the state of every person who has at any time heard the preaching of the Gospel. Each one of us may find his own state represented by one of the four soils in which the seed was sown. The first contains a description of the dreadful state into which some persons have brought themselves; a state which is the more unhappy, because they who are in it have no notion of their real condition, and are therefore not likely to come out of it. A continued neglect of serious things—a continued indulgence in profane and foolish things—the thinking upon those things only which belong to this life; this is what makes the heart like a hard trodden foot-path, rather than like the broken ground that is fit to receive seed. Persons in this state have not only no inclination to attend to the subject of religion, but the manner in which they employ their time and thoughts, makes them unfit to receive the knowledge of spiritual things—their minds become darkened, so that they cannot see the reasonableness of what is taught in the Gospel, and cannot find the desirableness of the salvation of which it speaks. Such a state is not only the natural consequence of their way of going on; but we also find from the word of God that, in punishment for such conduct, He sometimes leaves them to the hardness which they have brought upon themselves; and suffers them to go on hardening themselves, as the condemnation of the way in which they have continued to neglect Him. (Rom i. 21, 22, 28—32 ; ii. 4, 5. Ps. lxxxi.

12. Matt. xiii. 15. Hosea iv. 17. 2 Cor. iv. 4.
Isa. liii. 1—3.) To such persons religion is of no importance at all ; they live on as if there was no such thing ; as if there was no God. If they happen to go to church, they pay no attention to the service, but just do as others do about them. What they hear in the sermon is very soon forgotten. The next thought about the commonest matter takes the place of any thing they may have caught by a moment's attention ; and as they walk through the church-yard home, a little talk about the weather, or the chat of the neighbourhood, is enough to put it all out of their head. But supposing there may have been something which seemed strange and startling in the doctrine they may have heard preached, so that their attention has been roused, and they do carry away with them some thought about it out of church ; the devil is always on the watch to take away the seed of the word, and prevent it from resting in the mind, lest it should produce any saving effect. In doing this, Satan works sometimes by their own thoughts, and sometimes by the talk of others. If they enquire what could the preacher mean, they are very soon answered by some false account of the doctrine preached —some statement that it is the particular way of the man, rather than the truth of God. Perhaps they are laughed at for giving heed at all, or perhaps the preacher is laughed at for his manner or his words. These are some of the means, by which the devil catches away any rising thoughts about the word of God from minds that are hardened in worldliness. (Acts ii. 13 ; xvii. 18, 32. 2Pet. iii. 3.)

QUESTIONS.

Do I ever go to church and pay no attention to what I hear ?
Is my mind too much occupied with the worldly thoughts
that pass through it, for me to give any heed to religion ?

Have I been turned away from serious thoughts by the talk
of other people, or the suggestions of my own mind, without
further enquiry upon the subject ?

2. It is but too common to find people, who receive the first impressions of religion easily and readily ; but afterwards are as easily led to alter their minds. In such cases there always must be a want of religious principle, and much ignorance as to what the religion of the Gospel really is. Our value and affection for any thing can only be proved when we are called upon to give up something for it. True religion is of such power and importance, that when we have once got hold of it, nothing can induce us to give it up : a real christian will bear anything, and forego anything, rather than turn away from the truth of the Gospel, when he has once effectually received it. (Hos. vi. 4. John vi. 67, 68.) If therefore any disadvantage to our worldly business, any unkindness in our worldly friends, any shame at being laughed at, any disappointment as to the effects of our religious profession, or any unhappiness which may be the consequence of it, can possibly alter our minds, it must be because we have not got the real religious principle in our hearts ; that is, because the "root" of the matter is not in us.

QUESTIONS.

Did I ever feel and express a stronger love of religion than I do at present ? If so, why is it less than it was before ?

Have I changed, because I found it too hard to bear the inconvenience, ridicule, or contempt, which was brought upon me by my seeming to be what is called "too religious"?

3. Religious feelings may be sincere, and may often affect us ; and yet they may be smothered and overcome by the trials or temptations around us, so that they come to no good result at last. Many persons are so much worried by their family troubles, or by their difficulty in earning their livelihood, that they do not attend to the concerns of their soul, even when their consciences tell them they ought. Many others are so busy in gaining the things of this world, and in thinking how they shall use them when they have got them, that their religion does little more for them than to make them sorry that they are not more religious. And great numbers of people are so carried away by the love of amusement— by the pleasure of having the mind engaged with what makes them forget every thing but the present enjoyment : by some idle pastime, or more idle gossip, that religion has no room to grow ; even though it may have taken some hold of the conscience. This is also commonly the case, when a strong desire for a particular occupation, or a strong affection for a particular object is so much indulged, that religion comes only in the second place. When this happens, people frequently deceive themselves as to their religious state, by looking to those feelings about the truth, which come forth whenever the favourite object does not stand in the way. Such a religion may go on for a long time ; but being smothered by these "thorns", there will be no fruit found upon it at the day of the great harvest ;

in other words, it may be sincere as far as it goes, but it will not save the soul.

QUESTIONS.

Does my worldly business make me put off attending to religion as I know I ought to do?

Do the pleasures of this world draw me away from what I know to be right?

Is there any body or any thing which I love so much that this affection stands in the way of what I know God requires of me?

4. It should be a very serious consideration with us that, though such a number of persons hear the preaching of the Gospel, only a part (and that a small part Matt. vii. 13, 14. Luke xii. 32) receive it effectually. Some never take it into their hearts at all; others seem to have received it, but not having the true principle of religion, soon give it up; others receive it, but not as the *one thing*, so that worldly things possess their hearts along with it, and growing up together stifle the heavenly things. It is only when the heart has been prepared by God's Holy Spirit working in our consciences, that the truth of the Gospel is really received and takes effect (like seed which falls upon ground that has been got into good order.). In such cases it calls forth a religious principle, which makes every desire and every habit give way to it; so that it becomes the ruling principle within us, not for a season only, but for all our lives—having heard the word we *keep it*. The outward circumstances, which would hinder the good effect of this principle in our conduct, are overcome—the difficulties and temptations which surround us may be very trying; but not having any hold

upon the heart, they only call forth a more *patient* continuance in well doing, a clearer proof of our faith, and produce a greater abundance of good works in preparation for the harvest of the great day. Some Christians indeed are enabled to shew their faith more plainly, and to be more abundant in good works than others, but the principle is the same in all ; and the least powerful among true christians will hereafter receive the blessing, “ Well done, good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt. xxv. 23. Heb. vi. 10.)

QUESTIONS.

How have I received the word of God which I have so often heard preached ?

Do I *sincerely* believe it, although it plainly proves that I am very far from what I ought to be ?

Have I *kept* it, by allowing the principle of religion continually to influence me in my conduct ? and what is the result as to my general feelings, words, and behaviour ?

If I hope that I am bringing forth some fruit, in what proportion is it—thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold, according to my means and opportunities ? and if not a hundred fold, why not ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to be kept in a softened and feeling state of heart ; that no worldly or sinful thoughts and desires may have power over you, so as to harden your heart and make you reject or neglect the word of God ?

2. Pray for deep convictions of sin, and for the influence of the Holy Spirit, to give you a true and decided spiritual principle to govern you in all trials and distresses which religion may bring upon you.

3. Pray for strength of faith, and a sense of the reality of heavenly things, that no earthly things may rise up to hinder the growth of spiritual religion in your heart.

4. Pray that your heart, being prepared by the Spirit of God, may receive simply and effectually the preaching of the Gospel, and may shew its power in your whole conduct abundantly.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O gracious God and Father, let thy grace continually soften my heart; so that I may be ever ready to hear and receive thy holy word, with an humble feeling of its great value, and my great need of instruction. Let no worldly thoughts or inclinations ever have power to harden my heart against thy goodness, nor to make my mind dull in understanding it. From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, good Lord deliver me. [2] Send Thy Holy Spirit with power into my heart, to make my conviction of sin deep and abiding—to establish me in the truth—to awaken me truly and fully to spiritual things; so that in all the changes and chances of this mortal life, I may embrace and ever hold fast that blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. [3] Increase my faith; enable me to cleave unto Thee with full purpose of heart, and to seek thy kingdom and righteousness before all. Grant me grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with a pure heart and mind to follow Thee the only true God. [4] May thy Spirit and thy Providence so

work in me, that my heart may be set to obey thy commandments. By thy special grace preparing me put into my mind good desires, and by thy continual help enable me to bring the same to good effect ; and grant that plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, I may by thee be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-SIXTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 10 to 17.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xiii. verse

11. mysteries	<i>means here</i>	doctrines beyond worldly knowledge
14. perceive	regard and apply
15. waxed gross	grown self-indulg- ent and stupid

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

When our Lord had told the story of the sower and the seed, his disciples (that is those persons who regularly attended his teaching) came up to him, and asked him why he made use of parables in teaching the people. Jesus answered their question by telling them that they, being his chosen disciples, had a greater advantage than the people to whom he was preaching. The things relating

to the power of the Gospel which are beyond the wisdom of men (and are therefore called "mysteries") were to be explained to them, but were left unexplained to the people. He told them of that rule of grace which he afterwards repeated upon several occasions; that those who receive the spiritual instruction given them so as to *take it in* (see page 192) shall have abundantly more opportunity, and more instruction: while, on the contrary, those who do not so take advantage of the instruction they have, as to lay hold of it and profit by it, shall not be allowed the benefit of that instruction which they neglect. It was for this reason that he taught the multitude of the Jews by telling them the doctrines of the Gospel in comparisons (called parables), because while they saw what Christ did, they did not take heed to His mighty works—and while they heard His words, they did not hearken to the lessons which He taught, nor consequently understand how to apply the lessons to themselves. He referred them to the message which Isaiah was ordered to carry to the Jews of his time; and declared that the same thing might be said of the Jews to whom Christ was then preaching, which had been said concerning those of the former generation. (Isaiah vi. 9, 10.) Though they listened to the message of God, as far as outward hearing went, they would not understand; and though their minds looked to the subject, and in the thoughts, so that they might be enabled to see the meaning, they would not regard and apply it. What caused this state was that, by continually neglecting their soul, they had got to love only carnal things, stupidly

choosing them before spiritual things; (this is the meaning of the heart being "*waxed gross*" —or "*made fat*" as it is in Isaiah.) They had no quickness in finding out the excellent things they heard, but listened without understanding, like deaf men—they did not like to see the real application of the truths set before them—they wilfully shut their eyes against spiritual light: because they had a fear that if they attended to the instruction, they must give up their carnal things, and might be forced to see the light, and hear the truth, and feel its power; and thus might repent and be changed, and taken out of their sinful courses, and have their souls brought into a healthy state by Christ.

Having made this application of the prophecy to the people, our Lord told his disciples that they on the other hand, enjoyed a particular blessing; for that their understandings were not thus darkened, nor their hearing of instruction thus in vain. They saw and heard to some purpose, which was a special privilege to them. Many of God's prophets, and servants in old time had longed to see the things which had been foretold about Christ, and to hear him preach the glad tidings; but they had been called out of the world before these things happened: whereas the Apostles had been favoured both in seeing and hearing the Christ who had been so long expected. (1 Pet. i. 10—12. Heb. xi. 39, 40.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The general state of man's nature is the same in every time, and in every generation; and

therefore God takes the same general way of dealing with men. The description which suited the people in Isaiah's time, suited likewise the people in our Lord's time, seven hundred years after; and also suits people in our own time, when eighteen hundred more years have passed. In our days those who receive the spiritual instruction they have with teachableness, and really seek to profit by it, are sure to find that God affords them greater advantages; and that the blessing which began by "small things," is mercifully increased to them in greater abundance.

On the other hand, a very little consideration will enable us to observe, that the neglect of opportunities produces the contrary effect: those who will not employ what advantages they have, soon become unable to profit by them—the hindrances in themselves become greater, and very frequently the means by which they might have improved are taken away from them. And thus our Lord's rule (declared in this portion) is seen to apply both to the good and to the bad in our days, as well as in the days of the Apostles. (see the fifty-eighth portion, page 135.)

This being the case, it is very important that we should learn from our Lord's application of the prophecy of Isaiah, what is the cause of that backwardness and difficulty in receiving spiritual instruction, which induces God to take away from us the advantages which we might have. He tells us that it is, because people stupify their hearts and minds by indulgence in things which belong to the world and the flesh only; and because they determine to shut their eyes against

the light of those truths, which (they cannot help feeling) must, if they were received and acknowledged in the heart, make them give up the things they love to indulge in. This cause works as strongly now as ever it did; and it is secretly working to hinder many a one from attending to the only things which can make him happy, either in this life or the next. Persons who may be in this state are in the most awful danger, for they are cutting themselves off from the only means of being saved; and if God should act with them according to this rule of our Lord, all opportunity of returning to the better way would be taken from them.

QUESTIONS.

How do I use the means of spiritual instruction which I have? Do I strive to profit by them? Do I feel that, if I neglect them, it is likely that they will be taken away from me?

Do I love to indulge in things concerning which I am doubtful whether they are right or wrong? Have I any secret fear that by attending more to religion I should be obliged to give these things up?

2. What our Lord said to the Apostles, of the blessed privilege which they possessed in seeing and hearing Him, may be applied as truly to all who have received the knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ, through the Gospel which has been preached to us by them. (John xvii. 20.) In this respect therefore, we too have a greater advantage than those prophets and servants of God who lived before the coming of Christ. We have not only the prophecy of what should come to pass, (as they had) but also the account of the things which did actually happen, when the prophecies relating to the Christ were fulfilled by Jesus. This account is given us by

those who saw the things they tell (Luke i. 1, 2. 1 John i. 1—3. 2 Peter i. 16.), and it is written under the teaching of the Holy Spirit himself. (John xiv. 26.) How greatly we ought to value this wonderful privilege ! How earnestly we ought to shew our gratitude for it ! We should also remember that the greater our advantages, the more we shall have to account for ; and therefore the more careful we should be to profit, and to make our profiting appear in our conduct.

QUESTIONS.

Have I really a thankful feeling that I have been born at a time and in a country, in which there are so many greater spiritual advantages than could be formerly obtained ?

Is this feeling of gratitude so strong, as sometimes to occupy my thoughts, and always to influence my conduct ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that God may give you grace to value the means of spiritual instruction which are placed within your power.
2. Ask for increase of grace, that every opportunity may make you profit by it more.
3. Pray to be kept from the prejudice against religion, which is produced by self-indulgence and the love of worldly things ; and from the blindness of mind to which that prejudice leads.
4. Give glory to God for all the spiritual advantages which you possess above so many other of your fellow creatures.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Thou merciful God, who desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live ; I give thee humble thanks, that thou hast been pleased to call me to the knowledge of thy grace, and faith in thee. Give me grace rightly to value those means of knowing Thee, which thou hast afforded me.
 [2] Increase this knowledge, and confirm this

faith in me evermore; and grant that every opportunity of knowledge which I possess may make my profiting more abundant. [3] From all blindness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, good Lord deliver me; and let me never stupify my feelings, nor prejudice my mind against the truth by indulgence in any evil thing. [4] Thanks be to thee O Heavenly Father, for thy abundant mercy in bringing me into this life with so many more spiritual advantages than thousands of others have possessed; enable me I beseech thee to use them all to the glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-SEVENTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. ver. 24 to 30. and 36 to 43.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion
MATTHEW xiii. verse

25, &c. tares *means here* a sort of weed not much known in England, called *xizan* in that country; like wheat in appearance, but the grain is of no use, and does harm to those who eat it.

38. children of the } heirs of the kingdom
 } believers in the Gospel
42. wailing crying for sorrow

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After our Lord had answered the question which his disciples had put to him, he addressed the people again and told them another instructive story. This was the parable which is called the parable of the tares and the wheat.

He said that the kingdom of heaven (that is

the power and profession of the Gospel) might be compared to the following case :—

There was a farmer who took care to sow his land with good wheat. This farmer had an enemy, who hated him and wished to do him all the harm he could. In the night-time while people were all asleep, this enemy went upon the land where the wheat had been put in, and sowed amongst it a kind of false wheat, called *zizan* (which grows like wheat till the ear is formed, but then turns out to be very different from real wheat, being not fit for any use, and hurting those who happen to eat it ; this is what is meant by the “tares” spoken of in the English Bible) : and then got away before day-light. All the seed came up, but there was no notice taken until the ear had sprung out of the blade, because it all looked the same ; but when it began to ripen, then the *zizan* was found out amongst the wheat. The farmer’s labourers went directly to their master, and told him what they saw ; and as he had sowed wheat on the land, they were quite surprised to find so much *zizan* growing along with it. Their master told them, this was the work of an enemy. The labourers wanted to go and take up all the *zizan* out of the ground, but the farmer would not give them leave to do so ; he said that while they were pulling up the *zizan* by the roots, they might not always know which was which, and so might root up some of the wheat ; or in pulling up the one they might not be able to help pulling up the other, as their roots were so mixed up together. He told them therefore to let the *zizan* alone, to grow with the wheat until the ripening time should come ; and

that, when the reapers should go into the field, he would give them orders to collect all the zizan first, and tie it in bundles for burning, and then to gather the wheat and carry it into the barn.

It was not until afterward, that Jesus explained this parable to his disciples, but we will bring his explanation in here, for the same reason that we did with the parable of the Sower and the seed ; putting what our Lord said a little out of its place, that the story may be made clearer, and be the more easy to understand. (see page 191.)

When the disciples afterwards came to Jesus and asked him to explain to them what he meant by the parable about the zizan, He told them that by the farmer who sowed the good wheat is meant Christ Himself ; and by the land in which it was sown is meant the state of the world in the Gospel times. The wheat means true believers in Christ's salvation : the zizan those who follow the Evil Spirit, and are like him, and therefore are called his children. (John viii. 44.) The enemy who mixed them with the wheat means the Devil ; the reaping-time means the end of this state of things ; and the persons, who are sent by the Master to reap, stand for the Angels of God.

In the same way that the zizan in the story was collected out of the wheat to be burnt in the fire, just so it shall happen at the end of the Gospel-times. Jesus Christ shall give orders to his Angels in heaven, to go and collect out of the number of those who profess to be christians, all persons whose conduct causes any scandal to the true people of God ; and all who continue in their sins. These shall be given over to that dreadful punishment of which they had so often been warn-

ed : they shall be cast "into a furnace of fire" where they will make the bitterest cries, but all in vain ; "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth". On the other hand, those who are represented by the good seed, "the children of the kingdom", "the righteous", they shall enter into God's kingdom of glory , appearing all full of brightness like to the bright shining of the sun. (Judg. v. 31. Dan. xii. 3. 1 Cor. xv. 49.) After giving this explanation, our Lord added that earnest call to attention, "who hath ears to hear let him hear". (Matt. xi. 15 ; xiii. 9.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The first parable, that of the Sower and the seed, was meant to explain the manner in which the word of God is received by each particular person to whom it is preached. To this Jesus added a second parable, for the purpose of describing the effect that is produced upon a whole society of people by the preaching of God's word. In order to shew this, He changed the comparison ; and instead of making the wheat to stand for the word of God, (as in the first parable,) He took it to represent those persons who are sincere believers in that word, to the saving of their souls. Such persons, joined together in company, are those who ought to make up what is called in the Scriptures *the Church* ; (Matt. xvi. 18 ; xviii. 17. Acts ii. 47 ; v. 11 ; viii 1 ; xii. 1, 5 ; xx. 28. 1 Cor. i. 2. Heb. xii. 23.) which means the body of believing people all over the world. These, who are the true christians, make

a profession of their faith—come together for worship—join in communion. By such outward things as these, they profess publicly that they are christians; and by living according to what they profess to believe, they shew that they are of the true seed, the planting of the Lord Jesus. But the outward things just spoken of, may be very easily done by any body; and the consequence is, that many persons do them, and thereby make an outward profession of belonging to the Church of Christ, who inwardly have no spiritual life; who, not being born of the Spirit, are not “children of the kingdom.” Some of these persons well know that they do not believe what they seem to profess: these are hypocrites. Others are ignorant of the nature of faith; and for want of knowing better, think they do mean what they say, though they have no real christian principle. Both these kinds of persons are represented in the parable by the zizan, or sham wheat; called “tares” in the Bible. They have the appearance of christians, but are not so in reality: and it is a fearful thing to think (what our Lord plainly declares) that all such make their profession of being christians under the power of the devil; who mixes them up with the true Church, to try if he can spoil Christ’s good work.

Every one of us, who call ourselves christians, must be either a true christian, made so by the Spirit of Christ, or a christian only in name, made so by the spirit of evil. This is a very serious thought, and should make every one of us very careful in examining the nature of our faith. Nothing can possibly be more important than this examination; because, upon the truth of this

point in each of our cases, depends nothing less than this—whether we belong to God or to the devil—whether we shall be hereafter for ever in heaven, or in hell. (2 Cor. xiii. 5. 1 John iv. 1. Rev. ii. 2.)

QUESTIONS.

I take myself to be a christian ;—upon what ground do I suppose that I am so ?

Have I been careless in deciding this question in my own mind ?

Am I fully sensible that there are many persons who have nothing but the name of christians ; and that all who are not real christians belong to the devil ?

Is there any likelihood that I am of this number ?

2. We learn from this parable, that the difference between the wheat and the tares, was found out when the fruit began to appear. The difference between the sincere believer, and the person who makes a mere profession without having the Spirit of Christ, can only be known to us by the steady course of conduct, by which true christians will shew what spirit they are of : while the conduct of the others will be according to the evil principles which are in them. (Matt. vii. 16—18) Upon seeing this inconsistency of conduct in some who make a fair profession of religion, many well-meaning persons have thought it right to cast them out of the church—to say they must be separated ;—or, what comes to the same thing, they have separated themselves, and tried to make a church of their own, into which only true christians shall be admitted. This is just what the servants in the parable wanted to do—to separate the tares from the wheat at once; but the master would not let them even attempt to do it. Every one who separates himself from Christ's Church, holding the true faith in the

country where he lives, and joins a little company of those whom he considers as more particularly the true Church, disobeys the command of the great Master and head of the Church, Jesus Christ ; and, however sincere he may be in his motives, tries to do what the word of God gives him no expectation that he will ever be able to do. We have no power given to us to look into other people's hearts : and though it is plain, that open sinners who profess religion are hypocrites at the time they do so, yet there are many of whom no man can say whether they are wheat or tares. We find also that every attempt that has been made to get together a body of people who shall be all spiritual "children of the kingdom," has always ended by shewing, that Satan will certainly find a way to get his people amongst them. We are told to expect a mixture of people, "bad and good" in the Church of Christ. (Matt. xiii. 47; xxii. 10.) The devil is always ready to make the mixture, and Christ tells us that for the present He permits it. For us then to try to alter this state of things during the Gospel-times, is contrary to scripture ; and in the attempt to make such alteration, as we may judge for the better, we should break all the ties by which people are bound together in this life—even if we were not, by mistakes in our judgement concerning particular persons, to root up the wheat with the tares.

QUESTIONS.

Have I ever felt my mind so hurt by seeing bad or worldly conduct in professing members of the Church, that I have felt disposed to separate myself from the Church in consequence ? Should I not in so doing have acted against the command of Christ ?

Do I encourage any persons in the mistaken notion that the Church must be a body of true christians only, by helping them to make a separation according to the judgment of man?

Does the evil conduct of some professing christians have the effect of making me more anxious to shew by my conduct that I am not one of the tares, but of the wheat?

3. There will not always be a mixture of true and false christians—a time is coming, when Christ himself shall make the separation, with perfect knowledge of each heart. His Angels will go forth at the proper time, called in the explanation of this parable—“the end of this state.” When all the true seed shall have grown up and brought forth fruit—when all the people, who are really born of the Spirit, and so children of the kingdom, shall have been numbered—then all the false professors shall be gathered together, and left to their awful punishment; and all the true christians shall have their happiness in the eternal kingdom of God, which is too bright to be described. Our great object in life ought always to be to “make our calling and election sure”; so that in the separation we may be found amongst “the righteous” for Christ’s sake.

QUESTIONS.

Am I daily influenced by the certainty of that great dividing of God’s children from the children of the devil?

Does it make me more desirous in every thing to make my calling and election sure?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that you may continually shew by your conduct that you are one of the true children of the kingdom.

2. Pray for the spirit of a sound mind so as not to be surprised by the evils which arise from a mixture in the Church of good and bad, and to know how to behave to those whose conduct is doubtful.

3. Pray that you may never fall into the mistake of making separations in the professing Church.

4. Pray that at the end of this state of things you may be found amongst those who are to shine brightly in the eternal kingdom of God.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Holy Father, who hast given thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to become a man, that He might purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, make me continually to be given to all good works, that I may constantly shew that I truly belong to thee, and that thy Spirit dwelleth in me. [2] Give me I pray thee the wisdom that is from above, and a spirit of a sound mind ; that knowing what thou hast taught concerning thy Church upon earth, and the evil enemy who would disturb it, I may never be discouraged nor offended at finding that mixture of good and bad which Satan is permitted to make. Teach me how to behave towards those concerning whose state I am in doubt, so that my light may shine before them, and lead them to turn into the true way of eternal life. [3] Keep thy universal Church in the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of peace ; and preserve my mind from any unsettled thoughts concerning it, so that I may never think of separating from the Church that truly professes thy holy name. [4] And when the appointed time shall come, and thine angels shall gather thine elect from every part of the world, grant that, having by thy grace endured unto the end, I may be gathered into thy heavenly garner, and be admitted into the glorious inheritance of the saints in light. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY-EIGHTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Mark's Gospel, c. iv. ver. 26 to 29.

III. THE MEANINGS;

[There is no word used in this portion the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord had now taught the people by the means of two parables: in both he had taken the corn with which the land is sowed, as the comparison by which he explained to them the nature of the Gospel times. In the first he had shewed how the Gospel must be received by each person; and in the second he had shewed the mixed nature of the christian Church. After this Jesus instructed them still further upon this important subject, by means of a third parable; in which He made use of the seed-corn for another comparison.

He told them that the kingdom of God (that is the times of the Gospel power in the world) might be compared to the way in which the seed-corn was sowed on the land. The sower casts it into the ground; and when he has done all that is necessary to the sowing, he goes about his business, sleeping at night and rising in the morning;

while the grain shoots up and grows by degrees, whilst the man knows nothing about the means by which it is made to grow. The growing of the corn when it is once put into the ground does not depend at all upon the person who sowed it : it becomes larger and stronger of its own accord ; first the green blade is seen, then the ear breaks forth out of the blade, and then the corn swells and ripens in the ear, all by itself. As soon as the corn is quite ripe, the person to whom it belongs considers his harvest time to be come, and sends the reapers into the field to gather it.

In this parable the seed is meant to express the christian church, or the body of believers in Christ, in every part of the world. They are converted through the word of the Gospel, which is preached by the Apostles and following ministers of Christ. These however only speak the words ; which is like casting the seed into the ground, and it is by the secret working of the Holy Spirit of God that the effect is produced. We cannot see how this work goes on—it is altogether spiritual and secret, and done by the power of God, without man having any thing to do with it, or knowing how it happens. (1 Cor. i. 27—31 ; iii. 5—7. John iii. 8.) This secret power of the Spirit has been at work in the Church of Christ, ever since the Gospel was first preached, and is at work now, and will continue to be at work up to the very end of the time appointed for the gathering of God's people. That time (when it shall come) is pictured in the parable by the corn being ripe ; and then shall that same thing take place, which was explained at the end of the last parable (of the tares), the Angels shall

be sent to collect the saints—the true Church ; which is called the harvest in this parable also. (Rev. xiv. 14—16. Matt xxiv. 30, 31.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

This parable gives a picture of the way in which the Church of Christ continues and increases in the world, and is preparing for the great day when all true christians shall be with Christ. This great work goes on in the whole collection of people called the Church, because it goes on in each one of those persons who make up the whole number. This parable therefore gives us as true an account of the progress of each particular christian, as it does of the increase of the whole Church : and so it is therefore a picture, in which each of us ought to find a likeness to that which is going on in ourselves, if we really belong to the kingdom of God. When the word of the Gospel has been heard and received in the heart, just as the seed is received in the good ground, (see page 197) the outward work of the ministry has been so far done upon us : but the inward work of the Holy Spirit will be going on at all times. The first appearance of spiritual life in us, which is shewn by a change in some part of our conduct, is like the hopeful appearance of the blade of green corn after sowing time. From this beginning a christian will certainly go on, increasing in spiritual strength ; and shewing more plainly the fruits of a christian character, as he grows in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. iii. 18.) This

gradual increase will never stop so long as a christian lives ; but he will be still growing more ripe in knowledge and in spiritual life ; just as the corn is always growing more ripe as long as it stands in the field. (2 Pet. i. 5—8. John i. 16. Prov. iv. 18.) It is for God to judge, when any christian has grown in grace as much as He sees fit ; and when this is the case, to take him as He pleases out of this life, that his soul may be ready at the Lord's coming, to rise first with all those who shall have died in Christ. (1 Thes. iv. 16, 17.)

QUESTIONS.

If I have really received the truths of the Gospel into my heart, do I find an increased love of those truths, and a growing desire to know more about them ?

Have I reason to believe that, without any sudden great alteration since I first began to attend to religion, I have gradually but certainly become more religious ?

Is this progress plain within these four or five years past, or three years, or two years, or am I more settled in religion than I was a year ago ?

If not, how is it that I have stood still ? May I not have gone back ? Am I sure that I am of the true seed really planted by God ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for the continual help of the Holy Spirit, that you may be always gaining more spiritual knowledge, and bringing it always more powerfully into practice.

2. Pray that this working of the Spirit may enable you to have a sure hope, that you will be kept by divine grace until you are ready for the great day of Christ's coming.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Thou gracious God, whose mercy endureth for ever, send thy Holy Spirit with great power into my heart, and continually increase that precious gift unto me ; that as thou givest good thoughts, thou mayest also enable me to bring

the same to good effect. Make me to grow in the knowledge of thy saving truth, and strengthen me in the practice of every thing I know. [2] And while thou workest in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure, comfort me with a good hope, that the work which thou hast begun, thou wilt continue until the day of Jesus Christ, so that I may be found ready to enter into his glory who is my only Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SIXTY NINTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 31, 32.
St. Mark's Gospel, c. iv. v. 30 to 32.

III. THE MEANINGS;

[There is no word used in this portion, the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

There was another circumstance relating to the times of the Gospel power, which our Lord was pleased to explain to the people by means of a fourth parable.

In shewing the nature of the kingdom of God by different comparisons, He said that the christian church (which he called the kingdom of Heaven) might be compared to a grain of mustard seed which a person set in his ground. (The seed

which our Lord spoke of by the name of mustard seed, is not exactly the same as that so called amongst us, though it is of the same kind. It is a very small seed indeed, and so far it is like our English mustard ; but grows up into a large bushy plant, which ours does not.) Our Lord said that the reason why the mustard seed was like the kingdom of Heaven, or christian church, was this ; altho' it is so very small when it is put into the ground, yet out of it grows a tree, larger than any other herb : so large indeed, that it spreads out into great boughs ; in which birds come to build their nests, and find plenty of shelter. By this parable the Jews were taught beforehand, what we, who live nearly two thousand years after the Gospel began to be preached, may know the truth of by experience. The christian church was at the beginning a very small collection of people ; only a hundred and twenty christians were found to assemble together after Jesus had gone up into Heaven. (Acts i. 15.) The Person who established the religion was despised in the world, and put to death as a common criminal. The first teachers were poor fishermen, and persons of but little account in the world. This was indeed a very small beginning ; like the small seed when first planted in the earth. But presently the number of persons, who believed in the Gospel, increased very much. About ten days after that meeting of the church, at which only a hundred and twenty persons were present, three thousand christians were baptized in one day ; and more were speedily added to them. (Acts ii. 41, 47.) In a very short time after this, the Gospel had made its way into the principal cities in

the world ; and great multitudes of people became christians. And now we live in a time, when many great nations profess the religion of Jesus ; and make it the law of the land, that the Gospel shall be preached : besides which, many Missionaries are sent into heathen lands, to try to persuade poor heathens, that they may find shelter and refuge in the religion of Jesus Christ. When this state of things is compared with the small beginnings at Jerusalem, after our Lord was crucified, we shall plainly perceive the likeness of the christian church to the great tree in the parable, which sprang up from a small seed.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

This parable shews that it is the will and intention of God, that the number of Christians should be continually increased, even as the branches of a bushy tree are continually shooting forth. It is the duty of every one who has found the value of the Gospel himself, to do all he can, that others may enjoy the same blessing. No one who is really in earnest about his own salvation, can remain satisfied without attempting, according to his means, to help on the growth of the great tree of Christ's Church. In our days there are many opportunities for even a poor man to do something, towards this great object. The different societies which are formed, for extending in various ways the knowledge of the Gospel, enable every one to help in this good work ; though it be with a very small sum of money. And when even this cannot be done, those who have themselves felt the comfortable shelter of

the branches of Christ's Church, will often feel disposed to pray that those branches may extend; and that such as shall be saved may be added daily to the Church.

QUESTIONS.

What have I ever done towards helping on the increase of Christ's Church upon earth?

Have I done as much as I ought to have done?

Do I ever pray with earnestness for the conversion of sinners who are still ignorant of the gospel?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that the preaching of the Gospel may be attended with more abundant success, and that many people in every part of the world may be converted.
2. Pray that your heart may be disposed to help on, by every means in your power, the preaching of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

SEVENTIETH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 33 to 35.
St. Mark's Gospel, c. iv. ver. 33, 34.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xiii. verse

35. *utter means here speak out
foundation beginning*

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord added a fifth parable to the people; for the purpose of explaining the nature of the Gospel-kingdom, which He was about to begin upon earth.

He said that this kingdom might be compared to the leaven (whether yeast, called barm, or any other kind) that is made use of by a woman in making a batch of bread for her family, which might take three pecks of flour. To prepare the dough, she takes a proper quantity of barm, and covers it up in the middle of the flour, and there leaves it, until ever part is leavened, and the whole rises

This parable teaches us that the spiritual principle of christian life (represented by the leaven), when it is put into the heart of any one, will work its way into every part of it—that it will influence all the affections—and be found in every motive of the conduct: just as every part of every loaf, of the same batch of bread, has been made light by the barm which was put into the flour at first.

All these things, relating to the new kingdom of grace, which our Lord intended to set up on the earth, He pictured before the people by these interesting stories and comparisons. He told them many more such stories, besides those which have been written down for us in the Gospels. In all these stories he led them on, giving them instruction step by step, as their minds were able to take in one point after another. But upon this occasion he did not say any thing to the people except the stories themselves; and when he and his disciples were together after the crowd was gone away, he explained to the Apostles the meaning of all the comparisons he had made.

In this discourse of parables, Jesus Christ did what the Psalmist had been guided by the Holy Spirit to do in the 78th Psalm. What was there said in the second verse was spoken by prophecy, so that it shewed before-hand what Jesus Christ would do when He came to teach the people. The words in the Psalm are “I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter (that is speak out) dark sayings of old.” When St. Matthew tells us that this word of the prophet was fulfilled by Christ; he shews us also, that what are called in the Psalm “dark sayings” means (as far as

they related to what Jesus would teach) things which God had kept secret from the beginning until the time when Christ explained them.

We see from the five parables already explained, what these secret things are. They describe the nature, character, and particular circumstances of the Gospel, called the kingdom of God, or the christian Church. It had long been foretold that it should come; but what kind of kingdom it should be, and how its power should work, had not before been particularly explained. It may be useful then here shortly to put together the general account of this kingdom, as learnt from these five parables.

1st. The Gospel though preached will not be received by many people, for three different kinds of reasons; and it is only those who do receive it effectually that will benefit in the end by its salvation. (see the parable of the sower and the seed, 65th portion, page 189.)

2ndly, When the Gospel is preached with success, the devil mixes up hypocrites and false christians with true believers. For the sake of the true believers, God permits this mixture to continue for the present; but hereafter He will make a separation of his own children, from those of the devil. (see the parable of the tares, 67th portion, page 207.)

3rdly, Though the christian Church is begun through the preaching of the Gospel, and following christians are added to it by the same means, yet it grows on and increases by the secret working of the Holy Spirit; by whose power every christian, and the whole church, is ripened and fitted for

the future state of glory. (see the parable of the seed growing secretly, 68th portion, page 223.)

4thly, Though the Gospel began to be preached as a small matter, and but very few persons attended to it at first; it was to grow and extend very widely, and multitudes of people and great kingdoms were to acknowledge its power. (see parable of the grain of mustard seed, 69th por. page 227.)

5thly, When the Gospel is received by any person, it becomes a principle of spiritual life; which extends its power to every part of the character and conduct. (see parable of the leaven, page 231.)

These are particulars which were never known until Christ explained them; but which have been fully understood and experienced in the christian church, from that time to this.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. There is nothing more certain, than that the *whole* heart must be given up to God, or he will have none of it. If the leaven of true religion be really placed in our hearts by the Spirit of Christ, it will produce its effect in *all* our conduct and *all* our motives. If in any one thing we refuse to be directed by christian motives, and continue to resist the working of the Holy Ghost upon our consciences, in that one matter, it will certaintly prove at the end, that we have not the true christian principle within us, and do not therefore belong to the family and kingdom of God. Satan very often tries to confuse our minds

by the temptation of some one besetting sin ; and so would make us go on deceiving ourselves with the thought, that a *great deal* of christian feeling in other matters, is a sign that things are upon the whole right within us. But this will be found to be a sad mistake at the last ; for the only religious state in which any one can be saved, is that in which the soul is under the power of the Spirit, when it leavens the whole heart, and is not effectually resisted by any sin

QUESTIONS.

Is there any point in my own character, to which I think it is not necessary to make religion apply ?

Is there any inconsistency in my conduct, which I do not choose to correct by the power of religion ?

2. We have not only our Lord's account of what he calls "the mysteries," or private matters in the history and character of the Church ; but we have the experience of a great many years since then, by which we can prove the truth of what he said. And while this ought to make us very thankful for our greater advantages beyond the people who lived in former times ; it ought also to make us more careful in comparing our own particular state with what is thus taught us both by Scripture and by facts. (see also application No. 2, page 211.)

QUESTION.

Do I, when reading the parables of our Lord, really profit by them ; striving sincerely to examine my true state according to them ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that your whole heart may be given to God ; so that there may be no part of your character or conduct, in which you shrink from doing his will and submitting to his law.

(Matt. xiii. 10. portion sixty sixth, page 207.) He told them that they who were chosen to be with him had the great privilege of being taught things, belonging to the future preaching and receiving of the Gospel, which had not before been fully explained. Whereas the people who were out of doors, and were without the knowledge of what had already been foretold concerning the Gospel kingdom, had all these things told to them by parables, in such a way as that, while they understood the story, they did not perceive its application, and while they heard the discourse they did not take in the lesson which it was meant to teach. This was done, because they had no inclination to turn from their evil and ignorant courses, to obtain forgiveness of their sins, if at the same time they were to be given up. Our Lord however expressed surprise that his disciples, who had the great advantage he spoke of, should not have found out the meaning of the story of the sower and the seed. If they could not apply this simple parable, how would they understand all the other parables, by which he had already taught, and would afterwards teach the people? He then gave them a particular explanation of the parable of the Sower; an account of which will be found in the sixty-fifth portion, page 191.

After having given them this instruction, He let them see what use they were to make of it, by referring them to what he had said, some time before in his sermon on the mount; where he had compared his disciples to the light of the world, and to a Town built upon a high hill. (Matt. v. 14—16. see thirtieth portion vol. i.

page 250.) When a candle is lighted it is not meant to be covered over with a corn-measure, or hid under a bed; but it is put in a candle-stick, and placed in the room so as to give light to the people who happen to be there. He shewed them how they were to apply this remark, by adding, that there was nothing that he taught to them privately, which he did not mean them afterwards to tell publicly; nothing that was a matter of particular instruction to them, as it were in secret at that time, which was not afterwards to be preached and explained to all people far and wide. Then he called upon them to be attentive to what he taught, by saying "if any man hath ears to hear, let him hear." And he told them not only to mind *what* they heard from him; but to take great care also *how* they attended to it. According to the degree of attention they paid, would be the instruction they received; and those who heard with a real desire to improve, should have more opportunity of improvement. After saying this, he again applied the rule which he had mentioned before, when he was answering their question in the boat. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." (Matt. xiii. 12. see portion sixty-sixth, page 208.)

Encouraged by these instructions, the disciples asked Jesus to explain to them the meaning of the second parable which he had spoken to the people; that of the wheat and the tares. Our Lord then gave a particular explanation of this parable also, an account of which may be found in the sixty-seventh portion, page 216.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. When the knowledge of the Gospel is really received by any one, it is like having a candle lighted, and brought into a dark room: and as soon as we find out that we have got this light ourselves, we must reasonably wish that others, with whom we are acquainted should have the same advantage. To keep what we know secret, and to say nothing about it to our friends, would be like putting a lighted candle in some place where it would be of no use to any body. The conversation of any one who is well acquainted with the Gospel, surely ought to shew some signs of that light which belongs to heavenly things. We live in a time, when all that Christ told his Apostles is openly preached, and constantly brought before us: so that none can have any excuse if they remain ignorant, with so much knowledge within their reach; nor ought any to find it difficult to speak upon a subject so generally known, and in which every person has so important an interest.

QUESTIONS.

Have I such a clear understanding of the doctrines of the Gospel, as enlightens my own mind, and brings the subject in a practical way into my every-day concerns?

Does my conversation with my neighbours lead to the subject of religion: and does it communicate what I know in such a way as is likely to do them good?

2. The abundance of religious instruction which is given us in this country, is very likely to make us neglect the warning of our Lord, to "take heed what we hear." That which comes very often to be received only through habit; and the

many sermons which are preached may lead to carelessness in many hearers, unless they are very watchful over themselves. Our profit does not depend upon the quantity of good instruction we hear with our ears, but on what we really attend to with our minds: and the reason why many people have become less interested in hearing Sermons than they used to be, is because they have allowed their thoughts to wander idly without checking them; and so their measure of profit became less and less, as their measure of attention grew smaller. It is no light matter to be present at the preaching of God's word: it is on the contrary a means of grace for which we must give account hereafter, and if the preaching of the Gospel, which we have heard has done us no good, we may generally trace the failure to our own want of attention, and carelessness in hearing. If people are living where they have many opportunities of spiritual instruction, and still do not find that they make any progress in Christian knowledge and practical religion; they should anxiously and diligently watch over themselves while they are listening to the Sermons, and most likely they will discover, that they have neglected the warning "take heed how ye hear."

QUESTIONS.

Am I in the habit of listening, with attention and interest, to the Sermons and other instructions which I go to hear?

Or, do my thoughts wander carelessly without checking them? and do I excuse this inattention because I think I cannot help it?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for a clear understanding of the doctrines of the Gospel, and for grace to speak on the subject in such a way as may make them clear to those with whom you converse.

2. Pray for an attentive spirit in listening to the instructions which you hear.

3. Humble yourself before God, for the much weakness and wandering of thought, which you have often allowed in yourself while hearing Sermons; and pray that you may receive more benefit in future.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O Thou Father of lights, who alone canst enlighten the understanding with the power of thy truth; cast the light of the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so powerfully upon my mind, that I may clearly perceive and know the doctrines of His salvation. Give me grace also to shew forth that which thou teachest me; that in all my conversation I may speak of thy truth in such a way as is most fitting to convey it rightly to the minds of others. [2] Enable me to mark, learn, and inwardly digest all the instruction which is afforded me; so that, whatsoever in thy holy word I shall profitably learn, I may indeed fulfil the same. [3] I humbly beseech Thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon my infirmities; and for the glory of thy name, turn from me all those evils that I most justly have deserved. How often have my thoughts wandered from the teaching which my ears have seemed to hear! and how little have I striven to check them! Forgive me those things whereof my conscience is afraid; and give me grace to profit more abundantly in future, for Jesus Christ's sake, my Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Our Father, &c.

SEVENTY-SECOND PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. ver. 44 to 46.

III. THE MEANINGS; or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xiii. verse

44. treasure means here money

45. merchantman . . . trader

46. pearls . . . jewels, found in some sorts of oyster shells; very scarce and of great value.

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After our Lord had explained to his disciples the parable of the good seed and the tares, he told them two other short stories or parables; which describe the different ways in which different people come to a saving knowledge of the Gospel-truth.

In former times (before there were so many different ways of putting money out to use as there are at present,) it was a very common

thing for people to hide what they did not immediately want to spend, by burying it under ground for safety against robbers. In doing this they would of course choose a place where there would be the least likelihood of searching for such a thing—an open field for instance. Many sums of money have been buried in this manner; and the owners have gone to a distance, or died, without telling the secret. By this means it sometimes happened, that another person digging in the fields accidentally found money which had long been hid: such a thing happened often enough to make it a well-known piece of good fortune. And in old histories there are many accounts of law-suits about sums of money that were thus found; in order to decide whether they should belong to the finder, or to the person who owned the land in which it had been hid. Our Lord then first compares the kingdom of heaven, or the power of the Gospel-salvation in the heart, to this well known kind of accident. He supposes a labourer to be employed in the fields; who, while at his usual work of digging in the earth, lights upon a quantity of money, which had been hidden in the ground where he was working. As soon as he finds out the value of the prize, he puts it back again, and covers it up for a time; and being delighted at his good fortune, he goes directly and parts with every thing that he has in the world, and buys the field in which this treasure is hid, in order that he may be master of the prize, which he knows to be worth a great deal more than all that he had before.

By this parable Jesus shews us the circumstances, under which some people become real

christians. It sometimes happens that, whilst they are engaged in their usual occupations in the world, without thinking about the concerns of their souls, some little circumstance which seems entirely accidental, brings them within the hearing of the preaching of the Gospel; and that just at the moment when, without their having known it, other circumstances had in some degree prepared their mind to attend to what they hear. The doctrines of the Gospel for the first time seem suited to their wants; and they begin to find out the value of those precious truths in the Bible, the power and application of which had before been hidden from them: although they had often listened with their ears to the words of that book.

When the great value of the Gospel is thus found out for the first time by any one, it generally happens that he is not able at once to take the great and precious promises of God in Christ, as belonging to himself. And while he remains in this state of mind, he does not speak out upon the subject of what may be called his spiritual good fortune; but rather hides the matter, as one who fears he has no right to be considered as a christian indeed. But neither can he rest satisfied in this state of mind, until the Great Treasure, which he has become acquainted with so unexpectedly, becomes his own. And to obtain this object there is nothing in the world which he is not ready to give up. He diligently sets to work to part with every thing, which stands in the way of applying to himself the joy of the salvation of Christ. He gives up all his worldly desires and habits—he lays aside all the pride he had in his own good-

ness---he thinks that all these are but little to forego, so that he may have a Gospel title to the free mercy of Christ.

In the second story which our Lord told to his disciples he made use of another comparison. Pearls are beautiful little jewels used as ornaments by Kings and rich people to wear upon their clothes. Some are very small, not so large as a small pea; others are larger, and now and then a pearl has been found nearly as large as a pigeon's egg. This however seldom happens, and therefore the large pearls cost a great deal of money. There was once a Queen of Egypt who had two pearls, the largest that ever were known; each of which was worth eighty thousand pounds of our money. There were people who got their livelihood and grew rich, by collecting and selling these jewels.

Our Lord said, that the power of the Gospel of salvation might be compared to the case of any of these traders in Pearls, whose business it was to look out for the best. While he was engaged in this search, he found one pearl so much larger, and finer than any other, that it was worth more than all the rest put together. As soon as he had found this, he directly sold all the property he had in the world, and purchased that one most valuable Pearl.

The difference between this parable and the last is principally with respect to the circumstances through which the truth of the Gospel has become powerful in a person's heart. In the parable of the Treasure we are taught, that the conversion of the heart is often brought about unawares; where the converted person has thought

little or nothing about religion at all. By the parable of the pearl we are taught that conversion often takes place in a different way. There are many people who sincerely desire to find out the best way of living a good life, and going to heaven after death. These are good things, and are compared to the "goodly pearls" which the trader was searching for. Whilst a person is sincerely seeking these things, his notions about them may still be very insufficient ; compared to that wonderful salvation which is procured by the death of Christ, and the reality of that holy life, which a true christian leads by the power of the Holy Spirit. But when a man, thus searching after right things, finds out the real power of the Gospel, he sees it to be very far above every other good thing which he had ever thought of ; and in order to obtain this divine power, he does just the same as the man did to get the hidden treasure : he parts with every worldly thing, and considers it all but as "loss" (as St. Paul says) "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord." (Phil. iii. 8—11.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. From these two parables we may gather in the first place, that the circumstances by which *one* person is brought to the knowledge of the truth, may be very different from those under which *another* is so influenced. This ought to warn us against forming our own notions of the steps which we may think *necessary* in christian life.

This is a mistake into which some people are apt to fall, by dwelling only upon the way in which they themselves have been led to attend to divine truth ; without properly considering the means which God has been pleased to take with others. One person has been brought up to feel great respect for religion, and to have strict moral principles ; he has afterwards experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, and finds it to be a Pearl of great price, which out-values all his strict notions. Such a person can scarcely believe that the same blessing is ever obtained, without that same early preparation through which he himself was led. Another person lives for many years in ignorance of religion, and in the indulgence of worldly practices ; and through the mercy of God, he is brought to spiritual life by some accidental circumstance, which alters the whole course of his conduct. This person on the contrary is apt to suppose, that no one can be truly converted, unless there has been such an unexpected change in his religious notions, as that which he himself has felt. Such views of the subject often narrow the mind, and lead men to uncharitable doubts concerning others. It is not a matter of importance in *what way* our spiritual life begins ; but the great question is, whether it has begun at all. If we have reason to believe, that we ourselves, or our neighbours, are really under the power of the Holy Spirit, we need not trouble ourselves with doubts, although that power may, at first have been felt unexpectedly in the midst of worldliness, or may have been granted to earnest endeavours in the search after divine truth.

QUESTIONS.

Do I think that a distinctly sudden conversion is absolutely necessary in the case of every christian?

Do I think that sudden conversions are dangerous delusions, and that the power of the Spirit comes always through previous religious preparation?

Do either of these different opinions make me uncharitably doubtful as to the reality of any person's religion?

2. There is no such thing as what is commonly called chance; but every thing is ordered by God's Providence, according to a wise plan. In dealing with any one, it may be part of God's plan, to make use of the smallest things that happen to him, for the purpose of bringing about great effects. And if this is true in general with respect to all things, it must be particularly so with respect to those things which relate to the salvation of the soul. A man may go to church *by accident*; or an *accident* may happen to his body, which may make him ill, and his illness may be the means of making him attend to the warning of some minister who *accidentally* visits him: but all these accidents (as they are called) are certainly arranged by the wisdom of God, to bring about the great blessing of conversion to true religion. Again, they who are most diligent in studying what is in the Bible, are brought to the effectual application of what they read, only in God's good time; and by the means which He may choose: even as the finding the pearl of great price was an accidental discovery to the merchant-man, who had been searching for pearls a long time. This should excite in us grateful feelings for the care which God has taken in each of our cases, if we are indeed living

under His power: and it should confirm our confidence, that he will certainly make all future things work together for our good. (Luke xii. 6, 7. Rom. viii. 28.)

QUESTIONS.

Do I look back, with gratitude to God, upon the circumstances by which I was brought to that change of mind which is true spiritual life?

Do I feel sure, that He makes use of the least things in his providence; and that he will make them all work together for my spiritual good?

3. Whether a due sense of the blessing of the Gospel has come upon us unawares (like finding hid treasure), or whether it has opened to us while we were searching for it (like discovering the pearl of great price); as soon as we have really felt the power of God in the Gospel, it becomes to us of more value than every thing in the whole world: and there is nothing which we have loved ever so much, that we shall not be willing to part with, if necessary, for Christ's sake. If any thing stand in our heart before this great object of belonging to Christ, we may justly fear that we have not yet found the Pearl of great price; since there is still something, upon which we put a higher value. We ought to be very particular in examining ourselves, whether we are willing to give up every thing for Christ's sake, if he should require it.

QUESTIONS.

Do I really value the Gospel above every thing else in the world?

Do I feel willing to give up every thing? or is there any thing which I feel I could not give up, if by keeping it I should be separated from Christ?

In what particulars have I proved this, when I have been called upon to deny myself that I may follow Christ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to be kept from judging of the religion of others according to the circumstances by which you yourself were brought to Christ.
2. Pray to be blessed with simple faith in the particular providence of God; and ask to have a grateful remembrance of the goodness of that providence as shewn to yourself, in the means which were taken to call your attention to the Gospel.
3. Ask for an increase of confidence in God's providential mercies for the future.
4. Pray to put a right value upon the Gospel of Christ, that you may prize it above every thing that the world can afford you.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O merciful God, give me I pray thee such a knowledge of thy power, that I may never suppose that thou canst work only in one way, while ordering the circumstances of a sinner's conversion. Enlarge my heart to receive as brethren all those who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; without measuring them by the means which thou hast been pleased to use, in bringing me to the knowledge of thy truth. [2] Give me I pray thee a spirit of faith, that I may see thy hand in all thy providential workings, however small may be the instruments of thy power; and let me ever have a grateful remembrance of thy goodness in all the means by which I was brought to know thy saving mercy in Christ Jesus. [3] May the experience of the past confirm and increase my trust in thy promised mercy for the future. [4] And above all I beseech thee, so to enlighten my understanding, and direct my heart, that I

may ever value, as my first and highest blessing, thy great love in the redemption of the world by thy Son Jesus Christ. Teach me how to prize that salvation, above every thing that this world can afford; so that I may be willing to give up every thing, in order to live to the glory of Jesus Christ my Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

SEVENTY-THIRD PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 47 to 52.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW xiii. verse

49. the end of the world	sever	means here	{ the end of the Gospel times
52. scribe	teacher	
treasure	store	

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Besides the two stories which our Lord told to his disciples in private, after explaining to them the parable of the good seed and the tares, he added another for the purpose of impressing more deeply upon their minds the instruction conveyed in that parable. He said that the Gospel-kingdom (that is the gathering of people into the christian church) would be like the casting of a large drag-net into the sea, for the purpose of collecting all the fish of every sort that were in

that part of the water. As soon as the fishermen have dragged that portion of the sea, so that their net is quite full, they draw it to the shore; and, sitting down, they proceed to sort the fishes they have taken. Such as are fit for use, they lay by in proper vessels; and the rest, being of no value, they throw away.

Our Lord added an explanation of the latter part of this parable. He said that the same kind of thing, as the casting away of the bad fish, should happen at the end of the Gospel-times. The Angels shall come from heaven, and divide all the persons, who have professed to be christians, into two different classes. They shall separate the hypocrites and the evil doers, out of the midst of the true believers who have followed Christ; and shall cast all such false professors into that awful punishment which is described as "the furnace of fire," where they shall be left to a continual grieving for the misery which it will be too late to prevent.

By this explanation of the latter part of the parable, taken together with the other parables by which Jesus described the Gospel-kingdom, there can be no difficulty in understanding the former part. By casting the drag-net into the sea, the general preaching of the Gospel is described. The object of the fishermen is, to gather all the fish that are fit for use which are to be found where the net is cast. And the object of the preachers of the Gospel is, to bring every body to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. The net is filled with fish; some of which are bad, and some good. And thus too the Gospel has been received outwardly, in this and in many other

countries, so that the whole mass of the people generally profess themselves to be christians: but, while many are really christians according to their profession, many are christians in name only, who neither feel the truth of what they profess, nor live according to it. A separation however will hereafter be made between these different kinds of christians, in the manner explained by our Lord. And we are now waiting until the Gospel shall have been so preached in every part of the world, that all God's chosen people shall have been gathered into it, as well as the false professors who are drawn along with them into the outward forms of christianity. Then the net may be said to be full, and will be brought on shore, in order to divide the good from the bad.

After instructing the disciples by these parables, Jesus asked them if they understood all the comparisons by which he had taught them. They told him that they had. Upon this he made use of another comparison, to shew them how to employ the knowledge they had obtained. He told them that every teacher, who has got true knowledge concerning the nature of the Gospel, its power in the heart, and its progress amongst men, may be compared to the master of a family, who having laid up a store of provisions for their use, brings out such as may be most suitable to the occasion of need; sometimes new things, that have only just been stored, and sometimes old things, which have been a long time laid by. (Cant. vii. 13.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. All the applications, pointed out after the explanation of the parable of the good seed and the tares, will also suit the subject of the drag-net (read them, from page 217 to 221): and we may take it as a sure sign that a right understanding of this subject is of great importance, when we find that, of all the points on which our Lord thought fit to give instruction, respecting the Church, this only is made the subject of a second parable. The mixture of bad with good, amongst persons all professing the same doctrines, and saying they believe the same Gospel, has always been a matter of surprise and difficulty. It has been the occasion of much trouble, and many unhappy divisions amongst sincere christians, who might have avoided all this, if they had rightly considered these two parables of our Lord. From both of them we may clearly understand, that it is not to be required or expected that the Church of Christ should be kept so pure and unmixed in this life, as that those only should be its members who will be saved in the life to come. While each one must take care that he is one of the "good," no one has a right to take upon himself to decide as to the separation of the "bad" at present. That separation will be made hereafter by the Angels of God, when the preaching of the Gospel shall have been completed: and it is the object of every true christian to live in continual watchfulness for that time.

QUESTIONS.

Am I disposed to separate in the worship of God from the body of christians in the country where I live, because of the opinion I hold concerning any persons who are members of it?

Do I constantly remember that, in the great separation at the end of the Gospel times, I must be classed as one who will either be saved for ever in heaven, or cast away for ever in hell?

2. It is a plain duty for every one who has received the knowledge of true religion, to make his profiting appear to those with whom he lives. A person who studies the Bible will find, that the Old Testament, rightly understood, is as full of Gospel-truth as the New; and he will be able to speak of that truth, sometimes in one way and sometimes in another. Every thing he learns out of that blessed book he will store up in his mind; and he will constantly be on the watch to use what he has learnt, in a manner to suit the different tempers, feelings, or circumstances of those with whom he converses. A sense of the value of scriptural knowledge, will make us as prudent in the use of it, as we are in the use of our household stores: the one is as necessary to the support of spiritual life in the people about us, as the others are to the support of natural life in those who depend upon us.

QUESTIONS.

Do I read the scriptures attentively, with the desire of profiting by what I read? and do I trust that I have profited?

Do I try to make my profiting appear in my talk with other people? do I endeavour to make my conversation useful to them, by bringing forward the Scripture knowledge I have, in the way best suited to draw their attention?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

See Heads for Prayer, page 221: and

5. Pray that you may have wisdom to know how to bring forward your knowledge of divine truth, in such a way as may be most profitable for those with whom you talk.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

Use again the prayer page 222: and add

[5] I thank thee, gracious Father, for whatever in thy holy word I have profitably learned: and I beseech Thee to give me a spirit of wisdom, that I may not only store up my knowledge for my own spiritual use, but may also know how to bring it forth for the good of those amongst whom I live. Grant, O God, that all my conversation may be so seasoned with truths new and old out of thy Scriptures, that it may be a blessing to those who hear it. I ask this for the glory of the name of thy Son Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Our Father, &c

SEVENTY-FOURTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Luke's Gospel, c. viii. ver. 19 to 21.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

LUKE viii. verse

19. press *means here* crowd

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

During the time that Jesus had this conversation in the house privately with his disciples, which has been explained in the last three portions (see p. 237), his relations made another attempt to execute the purpose of which we heard in the sixtieth portion. (see page 154, Mark iii. 21.) They had already come to the house in an earlier part of the day, to hinder what they considered his madness; but they had not been able to make way through the crowd which they found round the door. Upon that occasion they had sent to Jesus the message which induced him to declare the greatness of his affection for those who received the Gospel, and the nearness of the spiritual relationship by which such are joined to him. (see sixty-third portion, page 180. Matt. xii. 46—50. Mark iii. 31—35.) Jesus

had since then been for a long time teaching by parables publicly in the boat. And as he had dismissed the people from the shore, and returned with his disciples to the house, his mother and her other sons went again, to try to dissuade him from what they considered such unreasonable conduct. When however they came to the door, they found almost as many people crowding about it as there had been before ; so that they were not able to make their way to Jesus. It is most probable that they made this second attempt as soon as they knew that he had retired to the house, before there had been time for the multitude who followed him to disperse ; and therefore they must have come while Jesus was explaining the parable of the sower to his disciples. Though they sent no message this time, yet some of the people, seeing them, managed to acquaint the disciples within that the relations of Jesus were seeking him ; and those within told our Lord. Upon hearing it, he put his disciples in mind of the answer he had before given, saying to them "my mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it."

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

The applications, heads for prayer, and prayer of the sixty-third portion, will exactly suit the present portion ; see pages 181 to 184.

SEVENTY-FIFTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 53. and chap. viii. ver. 18 to 22. and St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iv. ver. 35.

III. THE MEANINGS;

[There is no word used in this portion, the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord had now been engaged all the day teaching in public and in private; and finding that the crowd of people which collected to hear him did not at all become less, but rather the contrary, He determined to leave Capernaum, and go across the lake of Gennesaret. He waited therefore till the evening was come; and then he left the house where he had been explaining the parables to his disciples, and walked with them to the shore of the lake where the boat was.

As they were on the way towards the sea, one of the scribes came up to him, and speaking to him in a respectful way, told him that he was ready to go with Him wherever He chose to conduct him. This scribe had probably been listening to the parables in which our Lord had been

discouraging to the people. Being much struck by the powerful manner in which Jesus taught, he had given way to the impulse which he felt at the time, and came forward in this manner under that influence. Our Lord however, who knew the hearts of all men (John ii. 23—25.), clearly saw that this man had not considered what he was about; and that though impressed for the time by what he had just been hearing, yet he was not prepared to take all the consequences of becoming a disciple of Jesus. He therefore gave him such an answer as was likely to shew him the real state of the case, and what was required in one who followed Christ. He told him that though even the foxes and wild animals had places where they found shelter, and birds too had nests and trees in which they could roost; yet the Son of Man, the new Adam, had no shelter, no abode that could be called his home, no resting place upon earth.

While they were preparing to put to sea in the boat, one of the disciples who was of our Lord's party desired to excuse himself from going over with the rest, because his father had died that day, and he wished first of all to go home and attend to the funeral. Jesus however desired the disciple to follow him, notwithstanding the death of his father; and he told him to leave the care of the burial to those who were still in that state of spiritual darkness, which is called in Scripture, being "dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. ii. 1, 5. John v. 24.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. Our Lord's answers to the two persons who are spoken of in this portion shew the different ways in which he wisely treated different characters. The scribe was a person acting under an impulse which seemed to be good, but which did not proceed from the right source, and was not directed by proper knowledge. He was besides too forward, and too self-confident; nor was he at all aware of the self-denial and forbearance which is absolutely required of a disciple of Christ. Cases like this occur very frequently in the present day. Some person who fancies that he knows quite as much as is necessary, and thinks himself able to instruct others (this was the common state of mind of the scribes), happens to hear a sermon from some powerful preacher, who catches his attention, and puts the truths of the Gospel in some point of view which suits with his particular feelings. In consequence he at once determines to give his mind to the subject—to go often and hear this favourite preacher—to study the scriptures more attentively: and because of this determination, he thinks himself very religious, and puts himself forward as one who is a decidedly christian character. But such is very far from being the true state of the case. It is not enough to be fond of hearing certain preachers, or of attending to sermons, however good they may be, or however true their doctrine. A real follower of Christ must give up a great many things, in order to become like Christ. He must be content to suffer much inconvenience and many troubles, after the example of Christ; and he must not make his

home in this life in which Jesus had not where to lay his head. (Matt. xvi. 24—26. Rom. viii. 17. Phil. ii. 5—8. 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. iv. 13.)

QUESTIONS.

Do my religious views depend upon the preaching of any particular person? is my religion principally shewn by a pleasure in attending to sermons or services?

Am I ready to follow Christ whatever it may cost me? and do I practically deny myself anything, that I may be like Christ, and for religion's sake?

2. While, on the one hand, our Lord checked the forwardness of the scribe, who professed a desire to follow him, but without sufficient knowledge or consideration; we find him, on the other hand, reproving the backwardness of one of his disciples, who allowed even the duty towards a parent to interfere with his attendance upon Christ. The reproof was given to one who had already made up his mind to follow Him, but considered that there was a duty which stood before that of constant attendance upon Jesus: and our Lord took this opportunity of shewing, that whoever loved his father or his mother more than his Saviour, is not worthy of that Saviour (Matt. x. 37.); and that even the honour due to a parent must be "in the Lord." (Eph. vi. 1.) The doctrine of our Lord's answer to this disciple can be very plainly applied to every case, in which the duty of acting as Christ would have us act happens to be interfered with by something else, which would also be really a duty, if it could be made to agree with what Christ desires. Whenever this happens, there is no room for doubt or choice. Christ must be followed, whatever be the other matter which interferes.

There are many cases however, in which the real necessity for doing things will appear much less urgent to a religious mind, than to those who have no spiritual understanding of what is duty. Outward forms of respect should be attended to in their place. Worldly people however often put them in a higher place than is necessary ; and so make them out to be duties of more importance than some others which they value too low. This often makes them go after a shadow of what is good, while they leave the substance ; — so that they will neglect a clear christian duty, rather than be wanting in some outward attendance which custom has made proper. A little thought will enable us to find many cases, in which such a mistake might happen ; besides the case of this disciple, who wanted to neglect his service to Christ, in order to attend his father's funeral. Our Lord however warns his true disciples against this error, by telling them to leave such mistaken estimates of what is duty, to those who have not been born again of the Spirit, and who therefore are not acquainted with the true value of the one thing needful. (Luke x. 39—42.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I in the habit of considering my duty to Christ as having a higher claim upon me than even those customs of the world which are most proper and important ?

Or, do I think that I ought not to offend against any of these proper customs, even when the command of Christ may stand in the way of my fulfilling them ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that your religious feelings may arise from the right source, and be guided by proper knowledge.

2. Pray that your desire to follow Christ may be such as will enable you to bear any trouble that may come upon you for religion's sake.

3. Pray that, while you comply with the proper customs of those amongst whom you live, you may know how to value your duty to Christ above all the proprieties of the world.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] Gracious Father, to know whom is life eternal, give me I pray thee such a knowledge of Thee, and of Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, as may fill my heart with a true desire to follow Him whithersoever he may lead me. [2] Whatever trial I may be put to for his sake, give me grace to bear it: and let my desire to be found always with him, strengthen me to give up anything that would separate me from him. [3] Grant that I may be so advanced in spiritual life and knowledge, that my affections may be set on things above, not on things on the earth; and that I may know how to regard all worldly forms and customs at their right value. While I walk with all propriety and correctness with all men, may I never lay aside one religious duty to attend to matters of less importance. Give me grace in all my conduct to glorify thee, by giving up myself in all things to the service of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

SEVENTY-SIXTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, ch. viii. v. 23 to 27.

St. Mark's Gospel, chap. iv. ver. 36—41.

St. Luke's Gospel, chap. viii. ver. 22—25.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW viii. verse

24. tempest means here storm

25, &c. we perish we are like to be drowned

Luke viii. verse

22. launched forth set sail

23. in jeopardy in danger

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Jesus and his disciples soon came to the water-side, where the boat was kept. It was now getting dark, and he desired the people who still followed him to go to their homes. Without further delay the disciples pushed off the boat, in order to make a voyage to the other side of the lake. Some of the people however were so anxious to follow him, that they got into smaller boats which happened to be at hand, and went after him.

Our Lord must have been greatly fatigued with all the labours of the day; as soon therefore as the boat had set sail, he went to the part which is called the stern, and lying down, with his head upon a leathern cushion which he used for a pillow, he fell asleep.

They had not gone far, before the wind rose very much, so that it blew a violent storm. This made the waves of the sea rise very high; and, as they tossed the boat about, the water was dashed over the sides. At last so much water had come into the ship, that it was in great danger of sinking, and yet our Lord was all the while asleep in the stern. When however the danger seemed to be very great, so that the disciples were much alarmed, they went to Jesus and awoke him. Their fear made them forget all ceremony in doing this: some called out Master; Master, we are sinking; others said, Teacher, do not you see that we are like to be drowned; and others again cried to him, Lord, save us in the midst of our danger.

When Jesus was thus roused from his sleep, he gently reproved them for their fear, and for their want of confidence in his power. Then he got up, and speaking to the wind in the midst of its violence, and to the raging water around him, he said with a commanding manner "Peace, be still." In a moment the wind ceased to blow, and the water became quiet, so that there was a great calm.

As soon as he had given this proof of his power he again reproved them for their unbelief; asking them why they were in such fear, and how it was that, after all they had heard and seen before,

they still had no faith in him. The disciples were extremely astonished, and were almost as much afraid at the sight of this miracle, as they had been before at the storm. They talked among themselves without being able to make up their minds what sort of person Jesus could be, whose commands were obeyed even by the winds and waves.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. By the circumstances which are told in this portion of Scripture, the wonderful nature of Jesus, as both God and man, is set before us in the way of practical proof. The doctrine of the union of the two natures in him, is taught us in many parts of Scripture. (Matt. i. 22, 23. Gal. iv. 4. John viii. 28, 29, &c., &c.) But in this we may see, by the facts which happened, both that he certainly was man, and as certainly God. That he was a man such as we are, or rather such as Adam was before he had committed sin, plainly appears, because he was subject to those infirmities of the body which are not the consequence of sin, but which belong to the state of man's nature ; such as hunger, (Matt iv. 2 , xxi. 18.) thirst, (John iv. 7 ; xix. 28.) weariness, (John iv. 6.) and so here we find that the fatigue, produced by continual teaching for a whole day, in public and in private, (the account of which has been given in the last fifteen portions) had so wearied his human nature that he required the refreshment of sleep ; just as would have been the case with any of us in like circumstances. This should lead

us to consider, that “he knoweth our frame” and can “be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” (Heb. ii. 14—17; iv. 15.) But again, it was the same Jesus who, when roused from his sleep in the midst of the raging winds and waves, spoke but one word to them, and they became calm. This shews that the man Jesus did not claim too much when he called himself the Son of God, and said that he and the Father are one. (John x. 30.): it points him out to be the very Word, by whom in the beginning all things were made (John i. 1—3. Col. i. 16, 17. Heb. i. 2, 3.); who said, let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let the waters be gathered together in one place, and it was so. (Gen. i. 6, 7, 9.)

QUESTIONS.

Do I endeavour to keep up in my mind a continual conviction that Jesus Christ is man as well as God, and God as well as man?

Does this lead me to depend upon his tender care for me in my weakness, and upon his mighty power to defend me in my temptations?

2. Our Lord's disciples had seen him perform many wonderful miracles; and they ought to have been fully convinced that it was impossible for any accident to have hurt Him, whose power was so great as to justify their believing him to be the Son of God: their natural fear however overcame all their faith. We have in some respects greater advantages than the disciples had then; for we live in the time when the Holy Ghost has come, to direct and support the faith of those who receive him: and yet we too often find the same weakness of faith in ourselves. Many circumstances occur which place us in danger, and excite

feelings of alarm in our minds. A christian may in such cases, be said to be like the disciples in the boat when the night-storm happened. As in their case, the Saviour is with him, though He may seem as it were to be asleep ; that is, though it may appear to an alarmed christian, that Christ is not at the time attending to his distress. Yet every one who has really received the knowledge of the Gospel into his heart, must already have had proofs of the love as well as power of the Saviour, sufficient to make it reasonable to believe, that He will never neglect those in whom he dwells (John x. 28. Heb. xiii. 5. Isa. xlivi. 1, 2) : and they have the Scripture-promise, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. (Rom. viii. 28.) To talk of depending upon Christ, when there is no particular occasion for alarm, is not like that proof of faith which is brought out in the midst of trials and distresses. If we do not trust in him then, it is to be feared that we have no real trust in him at all : and however great may be the storm of trouble or temptation around us, our true confidence is to be found in having Jesus with us ; who, though he may appear to disregard us for a time, is to all his people a keeper, "who shall neither slumber nor sleep." Psalm cxxi. 4)

QUESTIONS.

When I have been in distress, have I found that my faith in Christ has given way to alarm ?

If I consider myself as one that trusts in Christ, do I think this because of my profession in times of ease, or because of my proved dependance on Him in times of distress ?

Do I in the common circumstances of my life seek to maintain the conviction that Christ dwells in me : so that, if troubles should come upon me, I may have the comfort of being certain that Christ is with me ?

3. Though the disciples were weak in faith, yet in their utmost distress they came to Jesus, and called upon him to help them. And Jesus exercised his power to preserve them from the danger, although he reproved them for their unbelief. By his word "Peace, be still", he not only calmed the storm around them, but also the fears within them. Every sincere christian, however infirm, will find that when he calls upon Christ in earnest, the Saviour will act towards him as He did to the disciples in the boat. The earnest prayer to Christ, "Lord save me, I perish," will never be put up in vain out of an oppressed heart, even though it be spoken in fear or in haste. Our Lord's promise in such a case is "I will give you rest." (Matt. xi. 28.) And it only requires that he should use his power for us, to turn every outward trouble into a calm, and every inward fear to peace.

QUESTIONS.

Do my distresses lead me to more earnest prayer to Christ ?
Do I continue calling upon him until He shews his power by assisting me ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to have a right understanding of Christ's willingness to help you in your difficulties, and of His power to overcome them all.

2 Pray that your faith in Christ may be so proved and firm, that it may not give way in time of trouble and distress.

3. Ask for such a spirit of prayer, as may be increased in time of trouble, and may persevere until the answer to your prayers is received.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O eternal Saviour, merciful God, who hast taken flesh, and art in thy manhood at the right

hand of the Father in heaven, enlighten my understanding by thine own Spirit, that I may know that thou art ever ready to make intercession for me, and willing to give me thy grace in every time of need. Teach me by that same Spirit, to know the greatness of thy Almighty power, so that no difficulty may ever seem too much for thee to overcome. [2] I beseech thee to increase my faith, and enable me to bring forth in my daily conduct abundant fruits of a true and living faith, that my calling and election may be made sure to my own mind, and may remain firm, whenever I am placed in temptation, sorrow, or distress. [3] Give me a spirit of earnest prayer, which may be ever ready to lead me to thy throne of grace, when I am in the midst of trial, or under alarm: and so continue to bestow this blessing upon me, that I may never cease my supplications until thou hast granted them, and sent deliverance out of my trouble. AMEN.

Our Father, &c

SEVENTY-SEVENTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. viii. v. 28 to 34 ; and chap. ix. ver. 1. St. Mark's Gospel, c. v. ver. 1 to 20. and St. Luke's Gospel, c. viii. v. 26 to 39.

III. THE MEANINGS ;
or sense of some words as used in this portion.

LUKE viii. verse

30 &c. legion *means here* a great number — as

many as a regiment of soldiers

31. deep bottomless pit

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After the storm had ceased, the ship with our Lord and his disciples continued its voyage ; and by the time the morning dawned they had arrived at the other side of the water. The country was called Gergesa, because that was the name of the principal city in it ; and the people in general who lived in every part of it were called Gergesenes. That part into which Jesus came was called Gadara ; the inhabitants of which were called Gadarenes. All this country was along the east side of the lake of Gennesaret, opposite to the country of Galilee, which was on the west side.

As soon as Jesus had landed in the neighbourhood of Gadara, he met two men belonging to that town, who were in the most dreadful state, under the power of evil spirits: St Mark and St. Luke give the account of but one of these men, while St. Matthew tells us of both. (For an explanation of this possession by devils, see vol. i. p. 223, portion twenty seven; also p. 159, and 164, portion sixty-one.) The evil spirits had got such power over them, that they were more like wild beasts than men. They went about naked; and instead of living in any house they took up their abode, night and day, in the hollow parts of the rocks which were used as burying-places, and amongst other tombs where dead bodies were laid. They were so violent and mischievous, that it was quite dangerous for any body to come near them. There were no means of securing them: for the people had many times taken them, and put handcuffs upon them, and chains around them; but the devils gave the unhappy men such strength, that they had snapped the chains, and broken the handcuffs to pieces. And as it was useless to try to secure them, so it was also in vain to endeavour to tame them; no kind of treatment had any effect upon them. As often as they had been caught they had thus made their escape, and were led on by the power of the devil to wander about in the wild part of the country. They used to make horrible cries, and cut themselves with sharp flint stones.

As soon as these two wretched men saw Jesus, though they were a great way off, they ran towards him; and when he had come near, they threw themselves down on the ground before him,

in the manner usual in that country for people in an act of worship. As they did this, they roared out "what have we to do with thee" ? at the same time calling him by his name, and acknowledging him to be the "Son of the most high God." Jesus ordered the evil spirits to come out of them ; and while He was giving this command, the devils made the poor wretches cry out to him, with an oath, not to send them to their place of torment, asking him whether he was come to do so before the appointed time. (2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude 6. see vol. i. page 124.)

Our Lord, instead of answering, asked the evil spirit in the men what his name was : upon which, he said that his name was Legion. The word Legion means a regiment of Roman Soldiers, the proper number of which was six thousand : but the same word was also made use of to express a great many generally ; and it was in this sense that the devil took it as a name at this time, because a great many evil spirits had taken possession of these two wretched men.

The evil spirits speaking by the mouths of these men, earnestly entreated our Lord not to order them to go at once out of that country, and into the deep place of darkness prepared for them (called also the bottomless pit Rev. ix. 1, 2, 11 ; xi. 7 ; xx. 1—3. Matt. xxv. 41) : for they knew that whatever He was pleased to command, they were forced to obey. There was at some distance from them, and on the edge of the lake, a high hill, the descent of which suddenly broke off considerably above the water, so that it made quite a precipice with the lake at the bottom. On the side of this hill a very large herd of swine was

turned out to feed, consisting of about two thousand pigs. The evil spirits begged Jesus, if he meant to send them away from the men whom they possessed, that he would allow them to go into the bodies of the swine ; and Jesus allowed them to do so. The evil spirits accordingly left the bodies of the men, and entered into the pigs, and made them all run violently down the side of the hill, on which they had before been quietly feeding. They did not stop when they came to the edge of the water ; but threw themselves down the precipice into the lake, in which they were every one drowned.

The people who were taking care of the herd of swine were terribly frightened at what had happened, and ran away as fast as they could. They went to the city of Gadara, the inhabitants of which were by this time all stirring in the morning ; and told what had happened to every body they met, both on their way and in the Town, adding at the same time what had taken place with respect to the two wretched demoniacs. Every body who heard their story went directly to the place where those wonderful things had happened ; and the consequence was that presently a very large crowd of people had gathered round Jesus. They not only found our Lord and his disciples, but also one of the two persons out of whom the Legion of devils had gone, and who was now quietly sitting on the ground at Christ's feet. He had procured some clothes and had dressed himself, and was now plainly in his right mind and like other persons. (We are not told what became of the other man

from whom our Lord had sent the devils; and it was probably because but one of them shewed his gratitude by remaining with Jesus, that St. Mark and St. Luke mention his case only, without speaking at all of the other. See Luke xvii. 15—19.)

When the people who had thus collected saw this man, who for so long a time had been a terror to the neighbourhood, now so changed and subdued, they were struck with wonder, and fear of Him whose power had been shewn in so remarkable a manner. They that kept the swine and had seen what had taken place, told the whole particulars to the others who had come afterwards: and the consequence was, that these heathen people who knew nothing of the true God, were so struck with alarm, that they all joined with one voice in beseeching Jesus to leave their country; which He accordingly did, and turning back again with his disciples, walked towards the shore where the boat had been left. The man who had been saved from the power of the evil spirits went with him to the water-side, and begged that he might be allowed to continue with Him ever after. Jesus however would not grant this request; but told him to go home amongst his family and his friends, and let them know what great things the Lord had done for him, and what great mercy God had shewn him. The man did as he was desired, and immediately set forth on his return home. He not only told the story of our Lord's mercy towards him amongst his own neighbours in Gadara, but he walked about all the country called Decapolis, (which name means "the ten cities," because it included that number

of large towns.) He spoke everywhere of what Jesus had done for him, and all who heard him were greatly astonished at what he told.

When Jesus had sent the man away, he got into the ship with his disciples, and sailed across the lake back again to Capernaum; where he usually took up his abode, and which is therefore called "his own city." (See vol. i. portion twenty-sixth, page 217.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. This is one of the most terrible accounts of the power of the devil over sinful men which we have in the Scriptures; and shews the reality of such devilish possessions more than any other case mentioned. For if any person should fancy that the unhappy persons said to have been "possessed" were in fact only what we call mad, such a fancy is clearly proved to be mistaken by the fact that, when these men were restored to their right mind, the evil spirits that had ruled them went into two thousand swine; who presently shewed that they were under some evil influence, by wildly drowning themselves in the sea. This could never have been the case, if the two men had been only in a state of madness; because their coming to their senses could not in any way affect creatures that had nothing to do with them. Remember therefore, that the devils are real beings, and that they are now as much upon the watch to take possession of people's souls by sin, as they were when our Lord was upon earth.

And what a fearful degree of Satan's power is

seen in the case of these unhappy men. In the present day, when he is not permitted to shew his power over our bodies in so plain a manner as formerly, we are too apt to think very little of it, and to forget the terrible extent to which it may go. We hear indeed sometimes of miserable sinners guilty of some horrible or unnatural crime, under the influence of violent passion ; and this is nothing less than a possession of the devil for the time. But these cases are generally looked upon as something so unlikely to happen, that few persons consider them as only the result of a greater degree of the very same influence which rules over the common and every-day irreligion of the world. If Satan's power in the world were not restrained, many persons (who are now loath to believe that they have any thing to do with that evil spirit) would give way to as violent excesses as these unhappy men did. But while we learn this lesson from the portion before us, we are also plainly taught that Christ has Almighty power over him of whom we should otherwise have such good reason to be afraid ; and that by coming to that Saviour, we may be set free from the influence of the devil's most terrible temptations.

QUESTIONS.

1. Have I a real conviction of the fact that there actually are many real evil spirits watching to ensnare me into their power by sin ?

2. Do I ever feel a real alarm at the extent of their power ?

3. Does this make me more earnest in coming to Christ as the only power which can enable me to overcome Satan ?

4. Some people have thought it a strange thing, that Christ should have performed a miracle by

which so much valuable property should have been destroyed. Such persons acknowledge that this is the only one of the many wonderful works He did which had such an effect ; and a great many reasons have been thought of to account for what happened at this time. But these thoughts arise from a very important mistake at the beginning. It was *not* Christ who destroyed the swine of the people of Gadara ; this was done by the evil spirits. It was the *wish* of the devils, which they asked of their own mind, that they might go into the swine, to which they afterwards did so much hurt ; and it was by the *permission* only of Jesus that they were allowed to go. Now this is just the difference as regards every evil thing that is done upon earth : it is the wish and the pleasure of the devils to do evil, and wicked people are ever ready to join in that wish. When however they act upon these bad thoughts, it is not by the wish but only by the permission of God ; who “cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.” (James i. 13) We should apply this, when we are reaping any evil consequences from our own sins, or are suffering from the consequences of bad conduct in others. Our Saviour has no share in *causing* any evil to any one ; though he often makes use of the evil of wicked men, and of Satan, to produce good consequences to those whom he suffers to be tried by such things.

QUESTIONS.

Am I careful to keep my thoughts from murmuring against God, for any evil thing which happens to me, as if He had willingly caused it ?

When any evil comes upon me, do I diligently strive to find out why God saw fit to allow it, and what good he is likely to bring out of it ?

3. While the heart is under the power of the evil spirit, there is no room in it for any affection for Christ, nor any desire to follow Him: but as soon as He has set us free from such an influence, gratitude for so great a blessing opens the heart to him, and makes it the first desire to be always with him. A very striking change takes place when any one is truly brought under the power of the Gospel; which our Lord calls being turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." (Acts xxvi. 18.) It is not to be seen exactly in the same way as in the case of the man who, from being naked and fierce became "clothed and in his right mind": but it will certainly be shewn by an alteration in conduct, of the same nature though not in the same degree; and it will be marked by a constant desire to live according to the example of Christ. It would be reasonable to suppose, that such a change in any person who had been known in a neighbourhood to be wicked or worldly, would lead those who observe it to seek Christ more earnestly themselves. This however was not the case with the people of Gadara; who, on the contrary, begged Jesus to leave them, as soon as they saw what his power had done: and so it is now with those who are not themselves influenced by the Spirit of Christ. They see a man turned from that course of conduct which they do not disapprove as sinful, except only when it is carried to excess; and they find him following another course, which they are in no wise disposed to relish. The sort of religion which, while it reforms many a notorious sinner, also condemns even what such persons consider moderate worldliness, and forbids many things in

which they indulge, is a kind of religion that would go too far for them : while it might preserve society from some few robbers, and drunkards, and notoriously wicked characters ; it would at the same time turn a great deal of merriment into what they would call melancholy. This, they think, would be paying too dear for getting rid of a few wicked people ; and they would therefore be contented to leave the police to protect them from the robbers, rather than be troubled with a religion, which has so great power in turning the heart from what it loves in the world. Thus it often happens, that the blessings of the Gospel are driven from a family or neighbourhood, under the alarm produced by some remarkable conversion ; just as the Gadarenes sent Jesus away from their country, when he had relieved them of the nuisance which a legion of devils had brought upon them.

QUESTIONS.

Is my gratitude and love to Christ increased, in proportion as I consider the dreadful consequences of being left under the power of Satan ?

Am I apt to be jealous of that kind of preaching which I know has produced a remarkable change in some notoriously bad characters ? and am I disposed rather to avoid it as dangerous ?

4. Our Lord's conduct with respect to the different requests made to him upon this occasion, may help us in understanding the way in which he receives the prayers of different people. Many persons, who have with much earnestness prayed for some particular object seemingly most christian and proper, have nevertheless found that their prayers have not been answered, at least in the way they had expected and hoped for. Such

was the case with the man from whom the devils had been cast out, when he earnestly entreated our Lord, that he might be permitted to continue with Him. Jesus denied this request ; but the very refusal sent him at once upon the service of that Lord whom he loved, in a way which would more extend the glory of His name than the request which the man had asked for himself. In like manner every prayer of a sincere christian which seems to be denied, is in fact answered, though it may be in a way which tends more to the glory of God, than that which he who prays would have chosen.

On the other hand it is not uncommon to find that persons who pray for things which are according to their own worldly desires, rather than the will of God, seem to obtain what they want, as it were in answer to their prayers. (Psa. xvii. 14; lxxiii. 3—20.) This happened to the people of Gadara, who prayed our Lord to go away from them, and he complied with their desire. But this answer to their prayers was given in judgment; since it took from them the greatest blessing, and left them to the consequences of their own blindness. Just so even now, prayers are often answered in judgment; that those who pray according to their own evil hearts, may find the bitter consequences of following their own ways. (Numb. xxii. 19—22. 1 Sam. viii. 6, 7. Hosea xiii. 11.)

QUESTIONS.

When I am disappointed in not finding that God answers those prayers which I believe to be according to his will, am I satisfied with the conviction that he will bring about the same object in a better way than mine ?

Am I careful to make my prayers according to that which God approves?

Do I feel sure that if what I pray for is only according to my own wishes, to have those requests granted would turn out a curse rather than a blessing?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray to be kept in a state of watchfulness against the power of Satan, and a constant dependance upon Christ to enable you to overcome him?

2. Pray for the spirit of a sound mind, to make you see the difference between the evil which Satan produces, and the permission of God in allowing it; and to enable you to find out and fulfil the good which God works out of every evil.

3. Pray that your heart may not only be freed from the power of evil spirits, but also filled with the love of Christ; and that every instance of his love which you know, may teach you to value the Gospel more for yourself.

4. Ask for a patient and contented spirit in expecting answers to your prayers; and especially that you may be kept from praying for any thing except what is according to God's will.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O merciful God, who didst send thy Son upon earth, that he might destroy the works of the devil; send through him I beseech thee the Holy Spirit into my heart, to keep me ever watchful against the devices of that evil one, and all who obey him. Give me thy whole armour, O God, that through faith in my Redeemer I may be able to overcome all the power of Satan.

[2] Give me I pray thee the wisdom that is from above, that in the spirit of a sound mind, I may always know that Satan is the author of all evil; and that thou art wise in permitting that evil, in order to bring forth thine own good thereby. Make me to be like unto thee in desiring to bring good out of evil, and strengthen me to do so whenever thou givest me the occasion. [3] I

beseech thee, gracious God, let me not rest satisfied in being taken from the power of the evil one ; but do thou fill up my heart which he has left with the love of Jesus Christ my Saviour : and whenever I hear of Christ's power in turning sinners from the love of their sins, may it be a fresh occasion of rejoicing in the blessings of thy Gospel for myself. [4] Give me a faithful spirit of prayer, and patience to wait thine own time in answering my prayers. Give me humbleness of mind in expecting thine answers, and contentedness to receive them in the way thou shalt appoint. Grant me grace especially to know thy will concerning all I desire, and to ask only such things as shall be pleasing in thy sight, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. **AMEN.**

Our Father, &c.

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SEVENTY-EIGHTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Mark's Gospel, chap. v. ver. 21, and St. Luke's Gospel, chap. viii. ver. 40, and St. Matthew's Gospel, chap. ix. v. 10 to 17.

III. THE MEANINGS;

For the meaning of some words used in this portion, see page 29.

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

It was about six miles across the lake of Gennesareth ; so that when our Lord set sail from the shore of Gadara with his disciples, it would not be very long before he arrived at Capernaum. When the boat came to land there, a great number of people were already on the beach, waiting to receive him. Probably they had been alarmed, for fear the boat might have been lost in the storm which had occurred during the night (see portion 76, page 267), and were come to the shore to enquire what had happened ; so that when they saw him come back safely, they were all greatly delighted.

Jesus went from the boat to "the house", which most probably means that were he usually lodged when he was at Capernaum. (Matt. xiii. 36.) Here he partook of the morning-meal with his disciples; and while they were sitting at breakfast, a considerable number of people came into the house, and amongst them were many tax-gatherers, and other persons who were commonly considered as bad characters. Some of these (who perhaps might have been acquaintances of the disciples) laid down upon the couch round the table, and joined the meal. (see page 144.) Upon this occasion some of the Pharisees who were present, twitted the disciples about their Master's mixing at meals with publicans and sinners; just in the same way as other Pharisees had done, at the great supper which Levi (or Matthew) had given to our Lord, upon the occasion of his being called to follow him as a disciple. As these Pharisees put the same question, our Lord gave them the same answer as he had done to the former ones; adding only an application of that text in the prophet Hosea, (vi. 6.) which he had also before applied, upon another occasion, to those persons who had found fault with him for breaking the Sabbath. (see Matt. xii. 7, por. 49, p. 60.) It so happened that, immediately after this, some of the disciples of John the Baptist made the same enquiry of Jesus concerning fasting, which had also been made when our Lord was at Levi's supper. Our Lord answered these persons likewise in nearly the same words he had before used. All this has been particularly explained already, when the account of Matthew's supper was given; and therefore instead of repeating that explana-

tion here, it is better to refer to the former one, which will suit this portion of Scripture as well as that. (see 46th portion, pages 30—33.)

As the circumstances related in this portion are so nearly the same as those which happened before, it perhaps may be necessary to explain how we know them to have taken place on different occasions; particularly as the scripture which relates them is in St. Matthew's Gospel, and comes immediately after his own call to be a disciple of Jesus. St. Matthew however, says nothing about the supper which he himself gave; the account of which we learn from St. Mark and St. Luke. But he plainly says that the questions, both of the Pharisees and of John's disciples, took place at a meal just before Jesus was called to cure the dying daughter of the ruler. (chap. ix. ver. 18.) This (we know from St. Mark and St. Luke) happened at the time of his return from Gadara. Hence it is quite plain, that they could not have happened at the supper which Matthew had given six months before. If any body should think it strange that the circumstances should be so nearly alike, they should remember that it was now become a common thing for the Pharisees to reproach Jesus for joining the company of publicans and sinners (Luke vii. 34.): and that therefore such a reproach was very likely to be repeated over and over again. Besides, upon reading the account of the first occasion (Mark ii. 15—22. Luke v. 26—39.), and then reading the account of the second occasion (Matt. ix. 10—17) it will be seen that they were different in several points. The first was "a great feast in Levi's own house;" the second was a common meal "in the house." To the first, the

publicans and others were invited : to the second, those who sat down "came" without being asked. Upon the first occasion, our Lord made no reference to the text in Hosea ; which he specially applied in the second. It was the disciples of the Pharisees, with some of John's, who enquired of our Lord concerning fasting at the first : it was the disciples of John only who made the enquiry at the second. Our Lord spoke of fasting upon the first occasion, and of mourning on the second. These differences serve to shew, that this passage of Scripture gives an account of circumstances which are not the same with those spoken of in the forty sixth portion, though they are very much alike : and we may learn from the comparison, how useful it is to be very particular in examining the word of God, that we may have a clear understanding of the truth.

The applications Nos. 2, and 3, of the forty-sixth portion, together with the heads for Prayer, and Prayer, are exactly suited to the present portion. Refer to pages 33—36.

SEVENTY-NINTH PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. ix. v. 18 to 26, and St. Mark's Gospel, c. v. ver. 22 to 43, and St. Luke's Gospel, c. viii. v. 41 to 56.

III. THE MEANINGS;

or sense of some words as used in this portion.

MATTHEW ix. verse

20. hem of his garment *means here* the border or edge of his mantle or cloak
23. minstrels persons who play upon the pipe, or flute

MARK v. verse

38. wailed moaned
39. ado bustle

LUKE viii. verse

44. staunched . . . stopped

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

As Jesus was explaining the subject of fasting to the disciples of John the Baptist, he was interrupted by a person who came to him in great distress. His name was Jairus, and he was one of those who were called rulers of the synagogue. (see vol. i. page 210.) As soon as Jairus came into the room, he cast himself upon his face before

our Lord in token of worship, and earnestly begged Him to go along with him to his house ; where he had left his only daughter, a little girl of twelve years old, lying in the struggles of death, so that he even feared that she might be dead by the time he was speaking : but although she was so far gone, this man believed that if Jesus would come and put his hands upon her, the disease would be taken away, and she would be preserved from dying. Jesus immediately rose from the table, and went with the man ; and his disciples followed them.

As usual, a large number of people had collected about Jesus ; and now the whole crowd went along with him through the streets, towards the ruler's house ; there were so many, that they pressed quite close round him as they pushed each other to get near. Among the rest, there was a woman who for twelve years had been afflicted with an issue of blood. She had been to many doctors, under whose treatment she had gone through a great deal, and she had laid out all her money in this way : but none of them had done her any good, on the contrary she was worse rather than better. She had heard however of Jesus, and of the wonderful things which he had done ; and she so believed in him, that she felt certain if she could but touch his clothes, she should be cured of her complaint. She had come that morning amongst other people to see Jesus ; and when he came out into the street, she took the opportunity of getting near him. As the crowd pushed her close to Jesus, she touched the border of the cloak which he wore, not doubting but that this would relieve her. The moment she had done so, her illness went away,

and she felt at once that she was cured. Although several of the people about were pushed so close to Jesus that they could not help coming upon him, yet he knew directly the difference between the touch of this woman, and the crowding of the others ; and he was aware that his healing power had been exercised. He directly turned round and asked, who it was that touched him. Those about him immediately said that it was not they ; while Peter and his other disciples observed to him, that amongst such a crowd who were pushing about him, it was strange to ask what particular person had touched him. Our Lord however repeated that some one had touched him, in a manner different from the pressing of those in the crowd ; for that a healing power had gone forth from him, which would not have been the case upon the accidental touch of persons who did not mean to put their hand upon him for that purpose : and he still looked about to find the woman of whom he spoke. (See Luke vi. 19. and page 88.)

Jesus must have done this for the express purpose of giving the woman an opportunity to come forward of her own accord ; for he who secretly knew what had been the consequence of touching his cloak, must also have known every thing else. The woman was not long in taking the opportunity which he afforded her ; and though trembling and alarmed at the public observation which was thus brought upon her, she came forward, as the people made way for her ; and kneeling down at the feet of Jesus, she told him before every body what had been the matter with her—the reason she had touched him—and the perfect cure which had been the consequence.

As soon as she had told all this, Jesus spoke to her with great kindness, and bid her take comfort. He said that it was her faith in him that had been the means of applying his power to cure her; and he bid her go home in peace, assuring her of the certainty of her cure. From that time forward the woman never felt any more of her complaint.

This circumstance had detained our Lord upon his road to the house of Jairus, who was with him; and just at the moment that he finished speaking to the woman, a messenger came from the house to meet Jairus with the news of his daughter's death; so that (the man said) there was no occasion to give our Lord the trouble of coming any further. Jesus heard the message, and turning to Jairus, he told him not to be afraid, but only to believe, and that if he exercised this faith, it was not yet too late, but that his daughter should be restored. He then proceeded to the house; into which he would let nobody go with him, but Peter and the two brothers James and John, with Jairus and his wife. Every thing that was customary to do upon a person's death had already begun. It was usual in that country whenever a death happened in a family, to have persons who played on the flute, and made a melancholy piping to express sorrow. There were also women called mourning-women, who gained their livelihood by attending upon these occasions and making a loud crying and moaning, to join in the noise of the flutes. (2 Chron. xxxv. 25. Jer. ix 17, 18; xlvi.ii. 36—38. Amos v. 16.) Some of these pipers and mourning-women were in attendance at Jairus's house in consequence of the death of his daughter, and when Jesus came in they were making the

usual noises. He immediately desired them to stop, and bid them go away, saying that the young girl was not dead but only asleep. Upon this they all laughed at him, as being ignorant of what he was talking about, for they knew that she was really dead.

Jesus persevered in sending these hired mourners away ; and when he had got them all to leave the house, he went into the chamber where the body of the girl was laid out, taking with him Jairus and his wife, and the three disciples. He took hold of her hand, and said " Maid, arise." (The very words which he spoke in the Jews' language, are written down by St. Mark, ver. 41.) At the command of our Lord, the soul of the girl came again into her body ; she immediately came to life again, got up, and walked across the room.

The parents and the disciples were extremely surprised at what they saw ; but Jesus particularly told them not to speak to any body of what had happened (see p. 15, Mark i. 43-45.) He desired them to give the young girl something to eat ; that by taking food, she might plainly shew that she was restored to life and health. This was the second instance of our Lord's bringing a dead person to life, (see portion fifty-fifth, page 114.) And it made a great noise in all the country round about.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The first thing that strikes us upon reading this portion of Scripture, is the extraordinary blessing which is given to true faith. That state of heart, in which a person is really convinced that Christ Jesus (being what he represents himself to

be) is able to save both from sin and from its consequences, is the same kind of believing as that of which we have the two remarkable instances in the Scripture before us. In both these cases the blessings which were expected and received by this faith, related to the body; but our faith must go still further, and expect the blessings which Christ has promised to the soul, and which he will assuredly give to "whosoever believeth in him." (John iii. 15—17. see vol. i. page 174, 176.)

In the case of Jairus, we have an instance of the manner in which the natural affections of the heart lead this faith to seek for Christ's blessings upon those whom we love, and who are bound to us by natural ties. A father came to ask the life of his only daughter who was in a dying state, and when all hope from natural means was given up, he still had hope in the power of Christ. When this hope seemed to be cut off altogether by her death, our Lord desired him not to be afraid, but only to believe; and afterwards raised this child to life again. It is the affliction of many parents, to know their children to be (spiritually) not only in a dying state, but also dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph. ii. 1, 5.) In such a case, it is of no use to apply the common means of correction: but if the natural affection of a christian heart is shewn by the exercise of faith in Christ and prayer to him on behalf of the beloved object, if they continue without being afraid, only believing, then parents or relations may be encouraged to hope for that true change, which is a passing from death to life. (1 John iii. 14.)

QUESTIONS.

Is my faith of that kind which expects that Christ is able and

willing to do for my soul all the wonderful things that He has promised to those who believe in him ?

Does my natural affection for my relations lead me to spiritual exertion on their behalf? do I pray in faith, and without fainting, for the conversion of those whom I believe to be in danger of condemnation ?

2. In the case of the woman, a sense of her own danger and distress called forth the exercise of her faith. She had tried every other means in vain ; but her confidence in the power of Jesus Christ to heal her was so strong, that she felt that the slightest approach to him was enough to secure her being healed. It was this faith which our Lord told her had been the means of her cure, though the power which performed it was all from himself. It is precisely the same kind of faith, which is the means of applying to ourselves that blessed power to heal, which Jesus is so ready to exercise upon our souls. The right faith consists in a full conviction of Christ's power to save us from the condemnation of our sins, and to make us what God would have us to be ; together with a strong confidence that if we ourselves come to him, in ever so humble a manner, he will apply that power to us personally. It was because the woman had this faith, that her touch of our Lord's garment, drew at once his attention, and led him at once to exercise his power ; while the pushing of the crowd around him called forth no remark. The mere exercise of a formal religion, which rests mainly upon regular attendance at worship, or the use of sacraments, is the same as regards the soul, with the conduct of the people around Jesus with respect to outward things : it may be said to be a spiritual crowding round Christ, a coming very close to him. But as our Lord took no notice of the one, so he gives no heed to the other. While

they continue saying "Lord, Lord," it is as though he said, "I know you not." But if, in the midst of a hundred formal careless worshippers crowding into the same congregation, there be one humble believer, who comes to worship the Saviour with a deep conviction of His power, and a hearty trust that it is applicable even to himself; the compassionate help of Jesus is at once called forth by the touch of such a person's worship, and he turns readily to bless that faith with pardon, comfort, and peace.

QUESTIONS.

Do I consider myself a spiritual follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, only because I am regular in attending the appointed services of worship? Or,

Do I strive in every act of worship, to approach Christ in humble faith, and with a true confidence in the application of his love and mercy to myself?

3. The conduct of this woman, after she had been cured by the power of Christ, affords us an example of the way in which every one of us are called upon to give glory to Him, for the spiritual mercies which we ourselves may have received. It was very different from that sort of boldness with which a person not duly sensible of the shame that ought to accompany the very thought of sin, might be disposed to make an unnecessary display of his own circumstances. This woman drew back with modesty, and did not wish to speak of herself, until Jesus made it a duty for her to come forward: but as soon as this was the case, she was not prevented by any false shame, from publicly telling that which would do honour to the Saviour who had been so merciful to her. In like manner every one who has received that spiritual blessing, by which a great change has been produced in the heart and life through the power of

Christ, ought to feel so much humbled by a right sense of his former state and by his present unworthiness, as to shrink from the thought of speaking of his own case unnecessarily. But whenever any circumstances make it clearly a duty to come forward for the glory of God, and to tell of the mercies we ourselves have received, we ought not to be prevented by any false shame from plainly declaring even the particulars, if need be, of His dealings with us.

QUESTIONS.

Am I forward in speaking upon all occasions of my own "spiritual experience"?

Am I, on the other hand, unwilling and backward in telling of the power of Christ as it has been shewn towards myself, whenever a proper opportunity occurs on which my doing so might be to His glory?

4. Respecting the restoring the daughter of Jairus to life, the first application of portion fifty-five (page 116) will also be suitable here.

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Ask for a spirit of faith, so that you may be able to pray for every blessing which Christ has promised, in full expectation that he will grant them. Especially ask for the power of believing prayer in behalf of those who are connected with you.

2. Pray to be preserved from a formal spirit in prayer; and ask for a lively spirit of faith to apply the power of Christ to yourself.

3. Pray for such a sense of true shame for your sins, as may give you a christian modesty, to prevent your speaking unnecessarily of yourself; and at the same time such a desire to promote the glory of God, as may prevent you from feeling false shame in telling, upon proper occasions, what Christ has done for you.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] **O most merciful Father, who art always more ready to hear than I am to pray, and who givest more than I either desire or deserve, grant me such a spirit of true faith, as may make me**

confidently rely upon all thy gracious promises, and may lead me to pray to Thee in full expectation that thou wilt answer my prayers. I ask thee especially to bless me with an earnest desire for the spiritual welfare of those who are near and dear to me, and to enable me to shew that desire in persevering and faithful prayer on their behalf. I particularly intreat thy blessing upon (*here mention any of your relations who may more particularly need your prayers.*) [2] Keep me I pray thee from deadness of feeling in approaching Thee, let me not be satisfied with formal prayer only; let me not think that I shall receive any blessing because of lip-worship. But give me grace that I may come to Thee fully sensible of my own great need, and of thy great power and love towards me, so that I may be blessed with a lively spirit of faith in every act of worship. [3] Give me that real humility which may make me ashamed of myself as a sinner, and may produce a true modesty in my heart and in my conduct. Keep watch over my lips, that I may not speak unadvisedly nor be eager to talk of myself. But give me I beseech thee the spirit of a sound mind, that I may know when I may wisely speak for thy glory concerning those things which thou hast done for my soul. And whosoever I am called upon by thy providence to tell of thy dealings with me, give me boldness and wisdom to declare thy loving kindness and mercy, however it may expose my own folly and sinfulness. Hear me, O gracious Father, and answer my prayer, which I offer up in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Our Father, &c.

EIGHTIETH PORTION

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURE.

Read Matthew's Gospel, chap. ix. ver. 27 to 34.

III. THE MEANINGS ;

[There is no word used in this portion, the meaning of which seems difficult to understand.]

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

After raising the young girl from the dead, and restoring her alive to her parents, Jesus left the house of Jairus to return to that from which he had come out. On his way thither two blind men joined the crowd which was following him; and as they went along they cried out to him, entreating him to have mercy upon them, and calling him the Son of David. This was the name by which the Jews very commonly spoke of the Christ whom they expected to appear

(see portion seven, vol. i. page 56.) : because **He** had been described by the prophets, as “a righteous branch of David.” (Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15.), “as a root out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots.” (Isa. xi. 1, 10.) ; see also Matt. xxi. 9; xxii. 42. John vii. 42. Rom. i. 3. 2 Tim. ii. 8. Rev. v. 5; xxii. 16.

Jesus did not think proper to attend to them while he was surrounded by so many people ; but they followed him to the house, and when he had gone in, they went in after him. Our Lord asked them, whether they believed that he really had the power to do what they desired of him. They declared that they did ; upon which he touched their eyes, and said that his touch should take away their blindness or not, according as they really had faith or not. The consequence was that their sight was at once restored to them. Our Lord gave them very particular directions that they should not go and talk about this miracle to any body ; probably for the same reason which had induced him to wish his miracles to be kept private upon former occasions. (See portion forty-four, page 15, and portion fifty, page 72.) The men however were so overjoyed at the blessing which had been bestowed upon them, that they could not refrain from speaking of it wherever they went ; so that he became more famous in all that part of the country.

As they were going out of the house where Jesus had performed this miracle, some people were bringing in another object of compassion, for the purpose of applying to our Lord for help. This was a man under the possession of an evil spirit, which prevented him from speak-

ing. Jesus exercised his power to relieve this unhappy man also. The man immediately recovered his power of speech, and began to talk to all the people in the house, as well as to the crowds that were outside, who were all struck with astonishment, and declared that the like had never been known in all the history of their nation. The Pharisees however could not bear to hear the power of Christ thus plainly acknowledged; and as they were not able to deny the fact that such miracles were really done, they shewed their perverseness by repeating the foolish and wicked blasphemy which they had spoken the day before, when our Lord had performed a similar miracle by casting out a devil from one who had been made both blind and dumb. They had then said that it was Satan himself, whom they called Beelzebub, that enabled Jesus to cast out devils; and though our Lord had then shewn the foolishness and wickedness of what they said, yet they continued with obstinate hardness to say the same thing upon the present occasion. (See portion sixty-one, page 159.)

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scripture, see No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. The faith of these blind men was grounded upon a knowledge of the scriptural character of our Lord. They knew that the Christ was to be the Son of David, and they called upon Jesus as such. In consequence of this knowledge, they believed that the person, to whom they gave the scriptural title of the Son of David, was able to restore their sight; which was one of the divine

power's specially mentioned in prophesy as belonging to the Messiah. Our faith must be like theirs, resting upon the word of God, and believing only according to what we find written. It must have appeared very wonderful to these poor blind men, that by a word from the Son of David they might be able to see. But the Scripture declared that when he came, it should be "to open the blind eyes." (Isa. xliii. 7.); and therefore however it might seem extraordinary, they were emboldened to believe that this could be done, as soon as they believed that Jesus was the person of whom the scripture spoke. In the same way when we believe the Scriptures as true, and find that they lead us to Jesus; though the promises of spiritual blessings which we find there are very wonderful, and much beyond what we should venture of ourselves to ask, yet we need not fear to make them the subject of our prayers so long as we make the Scriptures the ground of our hope. Those who are really convinced of the difficulty they have in rightly understanding spiritual things, will be ready to acknowledge their spiritual *blindness*; and will gladly take advantage of the encouragement which the Scriptures afford to those who ask for more light from above, that they may know themselves, and know God. So that, in their hearts, they will be continually offering up the prayer of the Psalmist, "open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm cxix. 18.)

QUESTIONS.

Is my faith, not a vague notion of doctrine taken upon hearsay, but really built upon the word of God?

When I find that the Scripture is full of great and precious promises, does my faith truly receive them, so as to expect their fulfilment through Christ, however wonderful they may appear to be ?

2. Jesus was pleased to give the blessing, desired by these men, according to the degree of faith which they had in asking it. It was as if he had bid them bring their own measure that it might be filled. So that if they had brought a small one, they would have had little, and if a large one, they would have had more. This is a rule, according to which Jesus deals with us now. Those who come to him with much faith, are sure to receive a large blessing in proportion. While those who, when they pray, are doubting, and not expecting an answer to their prayers, are not likely to find His power so plainly shewed in their favour. Those who, when they pray, believe that they shall have what they desire, have Christ's especial promise that they shall certainly find their prayers answered. (Mark xi. 24.) It is plain that this cannot mean any belief but that which is founded on Scripture-promises; for none other can be called faith. The same doctrine is also explained by St. James (i. 5—7.)

QUESTION.

Do I endeavour that my prayers should be always offered up with a full expectation that God will answer them for the sake of Christ; that so I may hope that the blessing will be given according to my faith ?

3. The command given by our Lord to the men whom he had cured, not to speak publicly of the miracle, makes it suitable to read again here the first application of the fiftieth portion (see page 73.)

4. The conduct of the Pharisees upon the occasion of these miracles, in repeating the wickedness which had been so fully exposed by our Lord only the day before, is an example of what is continually done by those who oppose the truth of spiritual religion because they *dislike* it, rather than because they *disbelieve* it. The best and clearest arguments are thrown away upon such persons, and the most solemn warnings are equally in vain. They may be unable to answer the convincing things that are said in favour of religion, and so may be silenced for the moment; but upon the next occasion they make the same false statements as before, just as if there had been no answer given. This obstinacy is shewn, not only with respect to those general doctrines of truth, which thwart the desires of worldly persons, but also as regards the conduct of pious people, whose manner of living is a proof of the reality of that religion which the world dislikes. When an evil report against a religious person is once set about, it is readily repeated from mouth to mouth. After it has been contradicted and proved to be false, a conscientious person would not only say no more about it, but would also endeavour to remedy the mischief which had been done, by repeating the contradiction. On the contrary, the opposers of religion are too often more angered at the disappointment, than convinced by the explanation; and then they are sure to repeat the slander just as if it had never been contradicted.

QUESTIONS.

Do I attend with candour to arguments which are brought forward, in favour of doctrines which I do not approve?

Do I ever bring forward old objections, which I know may be satisfactorily answered?

Do I ever repeat any charge against a religious person which has been already denied?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray that your faith may always rest upon the true doctrines of Scripture; and that it may be so strong as to receive every doctrine and promise which you find there, however wonderful they may seem.

2. Pray for such a measure of faith, as may lead you confidently to expect an answer to your prayers for Christ's sake.

3. Pray for a spirit of candour, that you may be open to conviction; and a spirit of charity, that you may never "rejoice in iniquity," nor be ready to repeat doubtful stories against religious people.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O gracious Father, I pray thee for Christ's sake who is the author and finisher of faith, give me the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth, and to confirm me in the belief of it. Grant that I may receive all the doctrines and promises of the Scriptures as eternal truth; and though thy mercy in those promises is far above what I could either desire or deserve, let me not fall short of it because of unbelief. [2] Enlarge my heart towards Thee in prayer, so that while I earnestly desire what I ask according to thy word, I may also confidently expect that, for Christ's sake, thou wilt grant it to me; and that I may rest with a comfortable hope, that thy mercy will be upon me according to the measure of the faith which thou givest me. [3] Give me a sincere and candid spirit, that I may put away all prejudice, and may be willing to be convinced, even upon those points against which I have any objection. Keep me from all perverse opposition,

and give me that spirit of love, which rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth. Give me a readiness to believe what is in favour of others, rather than what is against them; and preserve me from the sin of keeping alive any slander, either by my words or in my thoughts. Grant these things I beseech Thee, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Our Father, &c.

EIGHTY-FIRST PORTION.

I. BEGINNING PRAYER.

MAY GOD, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, give me the HOLY SPIRIT, that I may understand this portion of his Holy Word, and profit by it. AMEN.

II. THE SCRIPTURES.

Read St. Matthew's Gospel, c. xiii. v. 54 to 58.
St. Mark's Gospel, c. vi. ver. 1 to 6.

III. THE MEANINGS;

MATTHEW xiii. verse
54, &c. country *means here* neighbourhood
57, &c. offended in scandalized at

IV. THE EXPLANATION.

Our Lord thought proper at this period to leave Capernaum for a time: perhaps the blasphemy of the Pharisees there, which had now been repeated (see the last portion, page 303), made it prudent for him to do so; as it shewed that they were determined to destroy him if they could. From Capernaum he paid a visit to the town of Nazareth, where he had been brought up. He had not been there, since he was driven out of the place after preaching in the synagogue, about sixteen months before (Luke iv. 16—30, see portion 25, vol. i. page 209.). Now however he returned there, and his disciples went with him.

Jesus remained at Nazareth until the following Sabbath day ; when he went into the synagogue, and began to instruct the people in the same way as he had formerly done. Many persons were present, and were very much surprized at his preaching. They were greatly puzzled to know how he could possibly have learned all that he knew and taught : and were much struck with the wisdom which appeared in what he said, and the power which was shewn by what he did. They called to mind the time when he had lived amongst them, before he had begun his ministry in public (Luke ii. 51, 52, see portion eleven, vol. i. page 85.) : they remembered that the person who was considered as his father had been a carpenter, and that the son had been brought up to the trade —they knew his mother Mary, and her other sons Juda and Simon, as well as his other relations, James and Joses, whose sisters were living at that very time in the town. (See twentieth portion, vol. i. page 160.) These remembrances of Jesus made it appear the greater wonder to the people of Nazareth, that having been so long amongst them like other men, he should now appear so much superior to others ; and they were quite scandalized that he should take so much upon himself, when they knew him to be a person of no importance amongst his fellow-townsman. In consequence of this feeling which prevailed against him at Nazareth, Jesus repeated to the people the remark which he had made the last time he had preached in their synagogue. (Luke iv. 24.) He told them that one who is truly a prophet, may expect to meet with respect and attention any where rather than

in the neighbourhood where he has been known from a child, or amongst his own relations, or even in his own immediate family circle.

The pride of the people of Nazareth made them strongly resist the doctrines which Jesus taught; and the consequence of their want of faith was, that they made it impossible for him to manifest his power by any great number of miracles, which he would have done had they believed on him. He healed a few sick people indeed, by putting his hands upon them, but this was all; and he wondered at the great hardness of heart which they shewed, in refusing to receive Him and believe His word.

V. THE REPETITION.

Now read again the Scriptures, See No. II.

VI. THE APPLICATION.

1. This visit of our Lord to Nazareth, after the treatment he had received from its inhabitants, affords a striking contrast to the conduct of the people of that town. They resisted his word, and rejected himself, because they had formerly known him as one living amongst them; and yet this tie of neighbourly acquaintance was the very thing which made him call Nazareth "his own country," and visit it again for the purpose of giving the people another opportunity of hearing and profiting by the saving truths of the Gospel. The same contrast is often shewn at this day, in the feelings and conduct of christians compared with that of persons who are not influenced by the Spirit of Christ. When worldly relations are at variance, the quarrel is often much more bitter than if the parties were not of the same kindred;

while on the other hand, a christian is always more anxious for the spiritual welfare of his own family than for others, even though his relatives or neighbours may have treated him in an unkind manner. Read the first application of the twenty-third portion, vol. i. page 195, which is also suitable here.

QUESTIONS.

Am I anxious to do all I can to bring my friends and relations to a saving knowledge of the Gospel ? and do I make fresh endeavours, again and again, after I have failed and have been treated unkindly by them ? or

Do I oppose the religious instructions which are afforded me by those who are of my own family or neighbourhood, because I was acquainted with them before they were able to instruct me ?

2. For our Lord's declaration, that "a prophet is not without honour but in his own country," the application, which was made when he said the same thing before at Nazareth, will also exactly suit the present occasion. (See first application of the twenty-fifth portion, vol. i. p. 213.)

3. As in the last two portions we had several instances of the effect of a sincere belief in Jesus Christ, and a proof that a blessing is given according to the proportion of faith (Matt. ix. 29,) so we have here an instance of the contrary effect produced by want of faith. Our Lord was as ready and willing to afford the people at Nazareth the benefits of his divine power, as he had been at Capernaum to heal the woman who touched him, (page 292) to raise the daughter of Jairus to life, (page 295,) or to give sight to the two blind men who called him the Son of David (page 302.): or if it were possible to suppose any difference at all, he would have given the preference to his own countrymen. What hindered the

Nazarenes from receiving the blessings, which had been so largely bestowed on Capernaum, was not any thing in Christ, but the evil lay in themselves. They did not possess that which is absolutely necessary to make Christ's power effectual in every particular case—a real belief in his word. This faith is to divine power, just what the eye is to the sun : the sun shines whether a man has got eyes or not, and so Christ's power is the same whether a man believes or not ; but as the man without eyes gets no light from the sun, so a man without faith gets no blessing from Christ. If we have no comfort in religion, we should be very careful not to charge against Christ the fault that belongs to the unbelief of our own hearts : and it will be very often found that the word of Christ does not produce any mighty effect in our thoughts and affections, entirely because some unchristian prejudice prevents us from receiving it in simple faith. (Heb. iii. 12.)

QUESTIONS.

Am I convinced that, if I am not in the full enjoyment of all the blessings of the Gospel, the fault lies with myself, seeing that Christ is willing to give me them fully ?

Am I very watchful against the effect of unbelief, in preventing me from receiving benefit from the word of God ?

VII. HEADS FOR PRAYER.

1. Pray for an humble spirit to overcome the pride which would keep up resentful feelings in you against those who are connected with you : and ask for grace to take every opportunity of renewing your attempts to do them good.

2. Ask for humility, to receive spiritual instruction even from those whom you have been accustomed to consider your equals.

3. Ask for a spirit of simple faith, to receive the word of God without prejudice or offence ; that you may not cut yourself off from benefiting by its mighty power.

VIII. THE PRAYER.

[1] O most merciful God, who dwellest on high, and yet takest care for the children of men, even thine own who have rebelled against thee; grant me, I beseech thee, thine own Spirit, that He may humble me, and break down in me all proud thoughts which would keep me in anger against those who have offended me; and especially against any of my connections or neighbours, who may have done me any wrong. Give me grace to be ready in taking every occasion to do them such good services, as may help them in the knowledge of divine truth. [2] Make me truly humble, that I may be willing to receive the instruction of thy Holy Spirit, whoever may be the instrument by whom thou mayest be pleased to convey it; and let not the remembrance that they are but my fellow men, whom I have looked upon as no better than myself, prevent me from profiting by the teaching of any who speak according to thy word. [3] Bless me with a spirit of simple faith, that no prejudice may interfere to hinder my receiving thy word, or to make me offended at any part of it; neither let my unbelief at any time deprive me of the full benefit of thy great love and mercy in the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Our Father, &c.

An Account of the parts of Scripture included in this Volume ; so that the reader may turn to the page, and the portion, where each is explained.

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A list of the different Texts which are referred to in the course of this volume, put down in the order in which they come in the Bible ; so that the reader may turn to the page put opposite to each text in this list, and he will find out something which will help to explain that part of Scripture. By the use of this list much may be learnt concerning many other parts of the Bible, besides those which are the principal subjects of the explanation.

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